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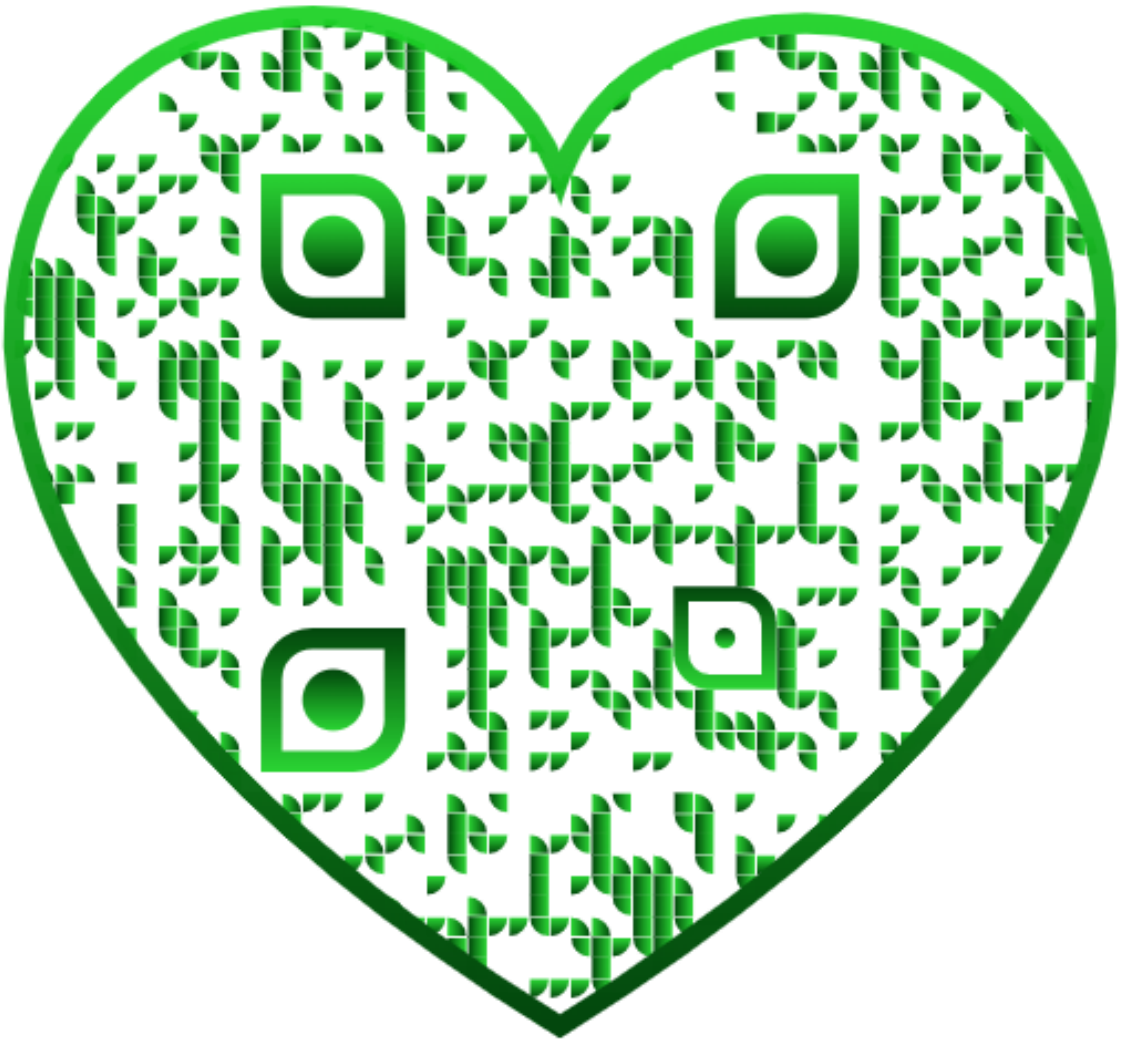

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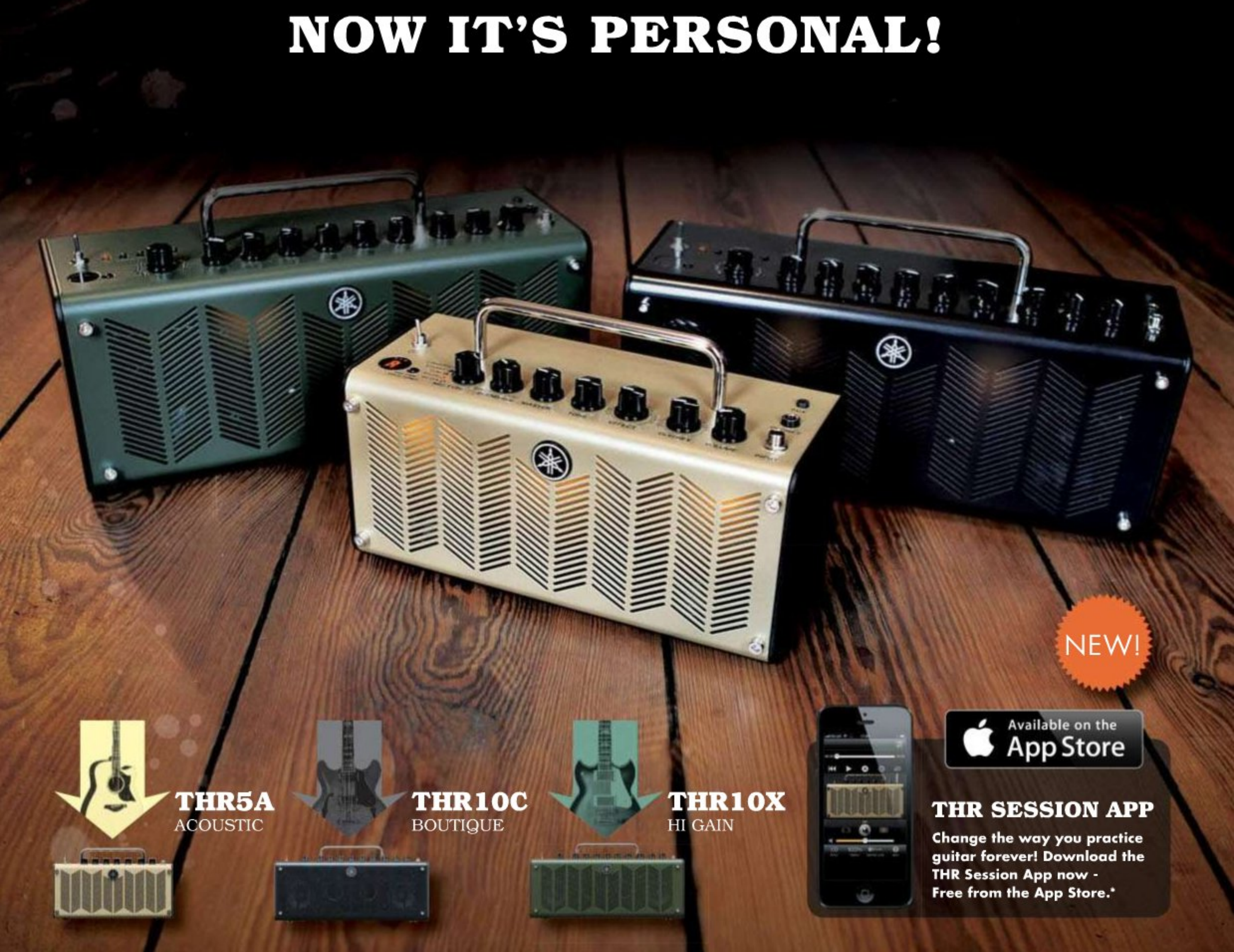

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Anthem Publishing
Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road,
Bath BA1 6PL
Tel **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

www.guitar-bass.net

Editor **Chris Vinnicombe**
chris.vinnicombe@anthem-publishing.com

Creative Director **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem-publishing.com

Production Editor **Gary Walker**
gary.walker@anthem-publishing.com

Contributors **Huw Price, Steve Clarke, Michael Heatley, David Gallant, Simon Bradley, Richard Purvis, Marcus Leadley, Rick Batey, Gareth Morgan, Lars Mullen, Phil Harris, Sid Bishop, Paul Day, Douglas Noble, Steve Bailey, Jo Johnson**

Instrument Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Digital Editor **Andy Price**
andy.price@anthem-publishing.com

Publisher **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem-publishing.com

ADVERTISING

Senior Sales Executive **Gemma Bown**
Tel **+44 (0) 7788 266847**
gemma.bown@anthem-publishing.com

Ad Production **Craig Broadbridge**
craig.broadbridge@anthem-publishing.com

ANTHEM PUBLISHING

Managing Director **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem-publishing.com

Editorial Director **Paul Pettengale**
paul.pettengale@anthem-publishing.com

Marketing Manager **Alex Godfrey**
alex.godfrey@anthem-publishing.com

Marketing Executive **Verity Travers**
verity.travers@anthem-publishing.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Print **Polestar UK Print Ltd**
Tel **+44 (0) 1582 678 900**

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd**
The Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street
London SE1 0SU *Tel* **+44 (0) 203 148 3000**

LICENSING

Jon Bickley *Tel* **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Jon.Bickley@anthem-publishing.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

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Tel **0844 322 1291** (UK)
Tel **800 428 3003** (US Toll Free)
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The sustain, listen to it...

I write this with my ears still ringing and mud ingrained deeply in the soles of my boots following three days of hard rock at Download Festival. One of the things that struck me over the course of the weekend was just how many of the guitarists on the bill took to the stage with Gibson Les Pauls; there were Les Pauls everywhere! On the one hand, it felt somewhat fitting given the event's close proximity to the 100th anniversary of the birth of Lester Polsfuss and on the other it reminded me that, shamefully, I don't own one. I've had a few Les Pauls over the years, but never found *the one*, although a couple of years ago an encounter with an all-original 1956 Goldtop with a neck that felt as if it had been carved by God's own hand did convince me that one day a P-90-loaded '56 reissue, or perhaps even a '54, will be mine. A real 1950s Gibson will have to wait until the unlikely event of either a lottery win or an international hit single.

Something that puts some players off using a Les Paul as their main stage guitar is that LPs tend to be a little on the heavy side, a factor not lost on Thin Lizzy legend Scott Gorham. We spoke to Gorham - not exactly a stranger to Les Pauls - backstage at Download, and he revealed that he's playing chambered models these days, as they are easier to handle over the duration of a show. There have been many methods employed to reduce the weight of Les Pauls over the years, but the latest solution from Gibson Memphis, that graces our cover this month, is perhaps the most elegant. How does this hybrid ES-Les Paul design stand up to scrutiny? Read our in-depth review, alongside Epiphone's affordable Florentine Pro model on p48 to find out. I hope you enjoy the issue...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

HUW PRICE

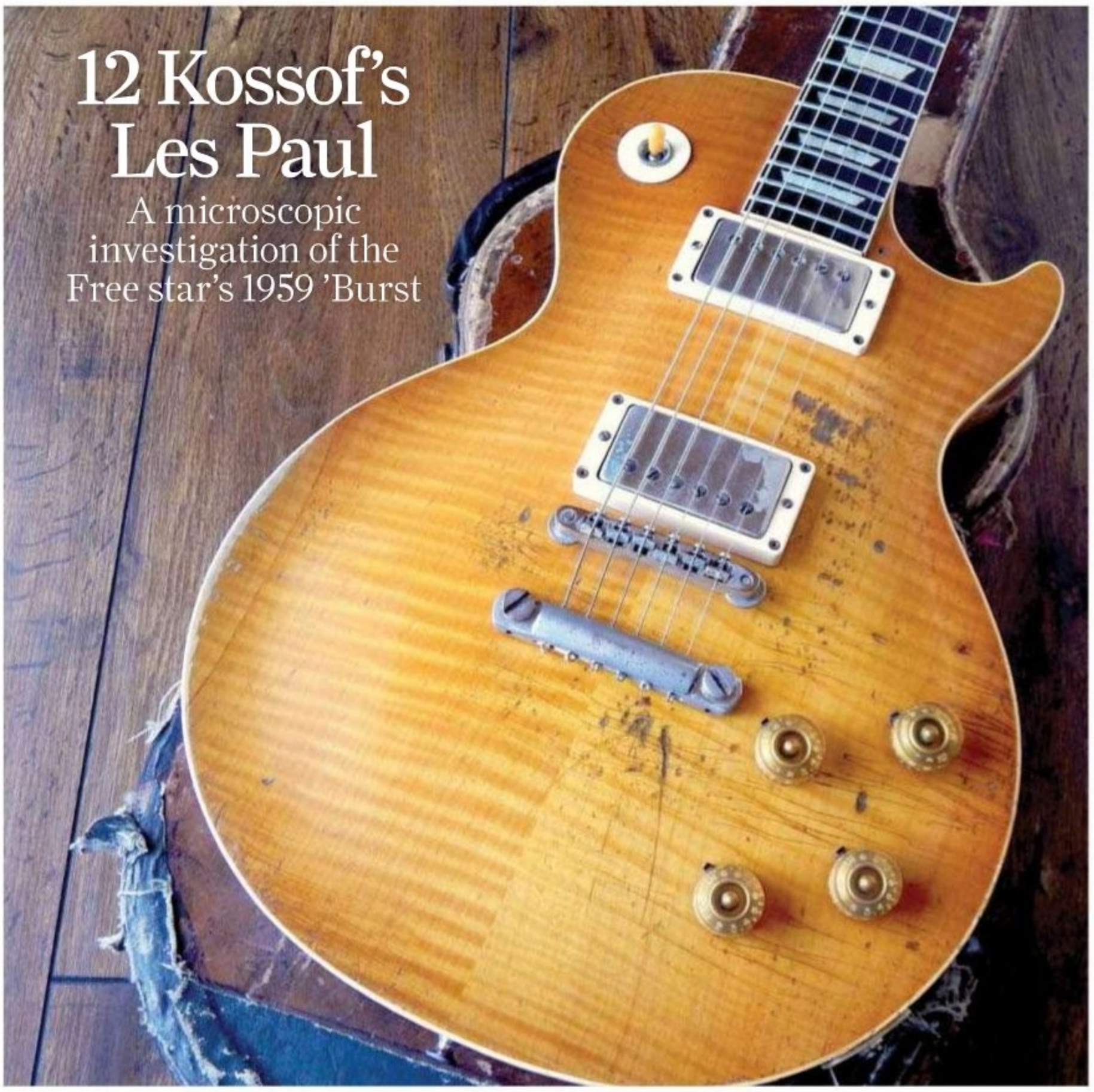
Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

ANDY PRICE

With a Masters in songwriting and a keen interest in recording techniques, part-time Alan Partridge impersonator Andy combines his work on *G&B* sister title *MusicTech* with perfecting his anecdote about the time he interviewed Bernard Butler.

JEFF SLATE

Jeff is a New York-based singer-songwriter and music journalist and a regular contributor to *Esquire*. He has interviewed everyone from Beatles and Pythons to Jimmy Page and Noel Gallagher, is an avid collector of bootlegs and an expert on all things Dylan.



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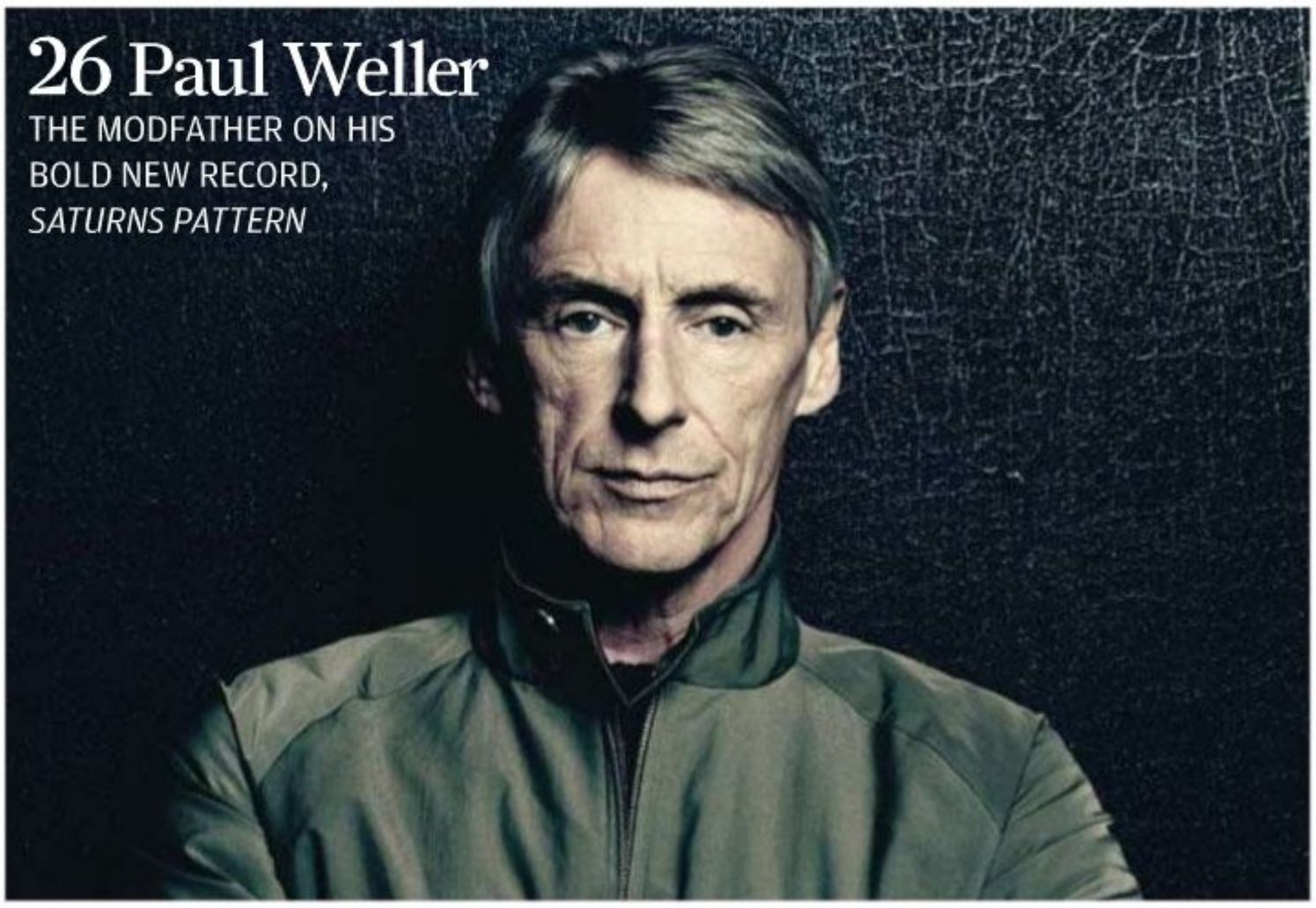
A microscopic investigation of the Free star's 1959 'Burst



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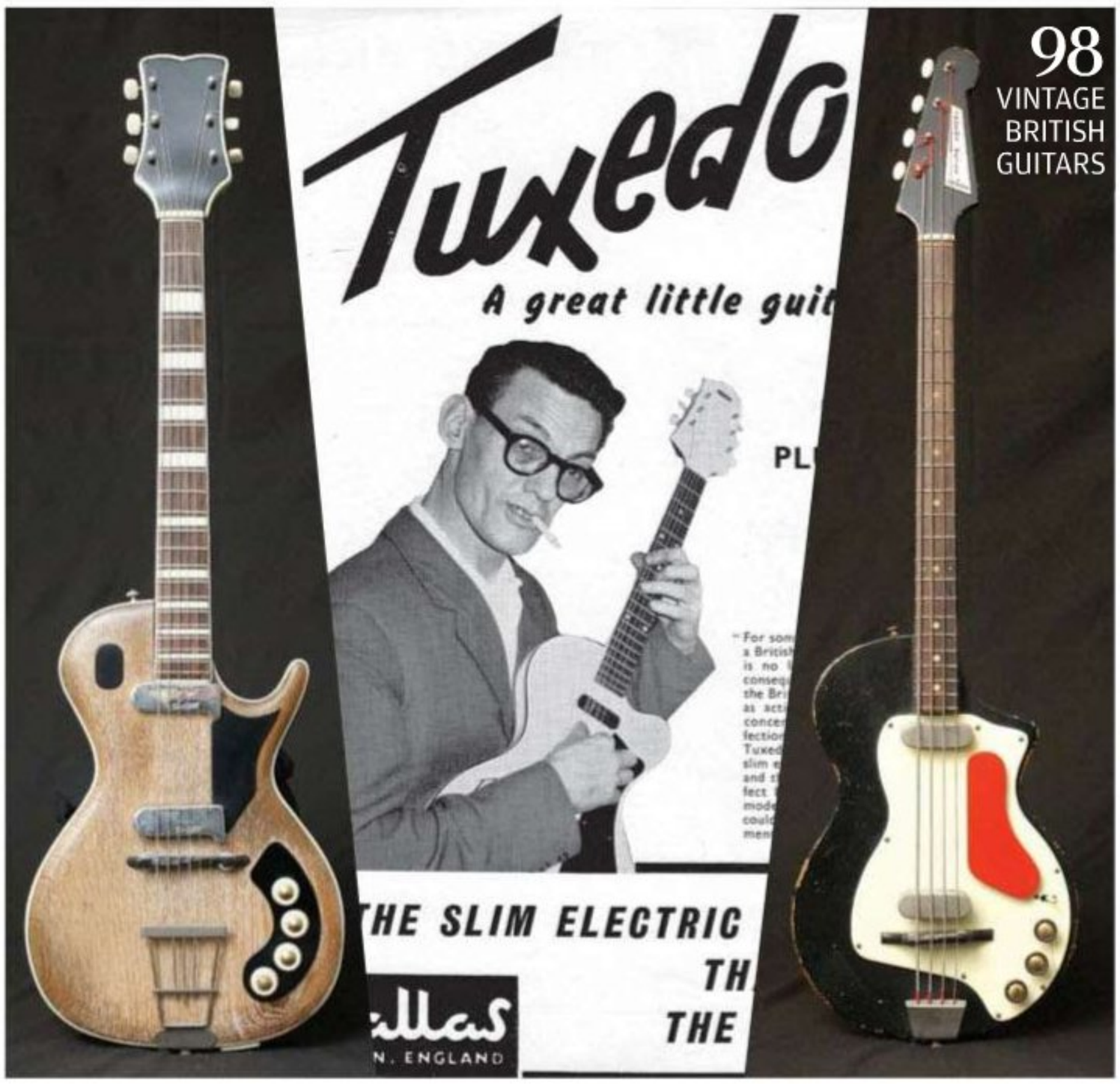

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This month's happenings...

LIVE & LOUD!

Download Festival 2015 brings the rock – and the rain – to Donington Park

It started with a fear of sunburn and ended in saturation, and we don't just mean the guitar tones blaring out from the Main Stage PA system. Shortly before going to press, Team G&B spent a rocking and slightly soggy weekend in a field in North West Leicestershire with 80,000 hard rock fans, enjoying blazing sets from the likes of Muse, Kiss, Slash featuring Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators, Blues Pills, Testament, The Cadillac Three, Slipknot and Von Hertzen Brothers. Visit www.guitar-bass.net to see more photographs from the festival, including a whole truckload of seriously cool guitars and basses - and a fair bit of makeup and leather into the bargain.

CODA UNPLUGGED

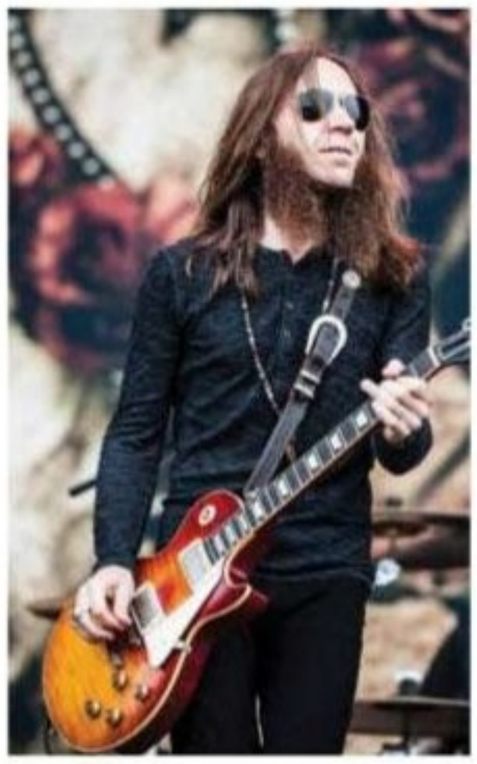
Leading Brit retailer opens new acoustic store

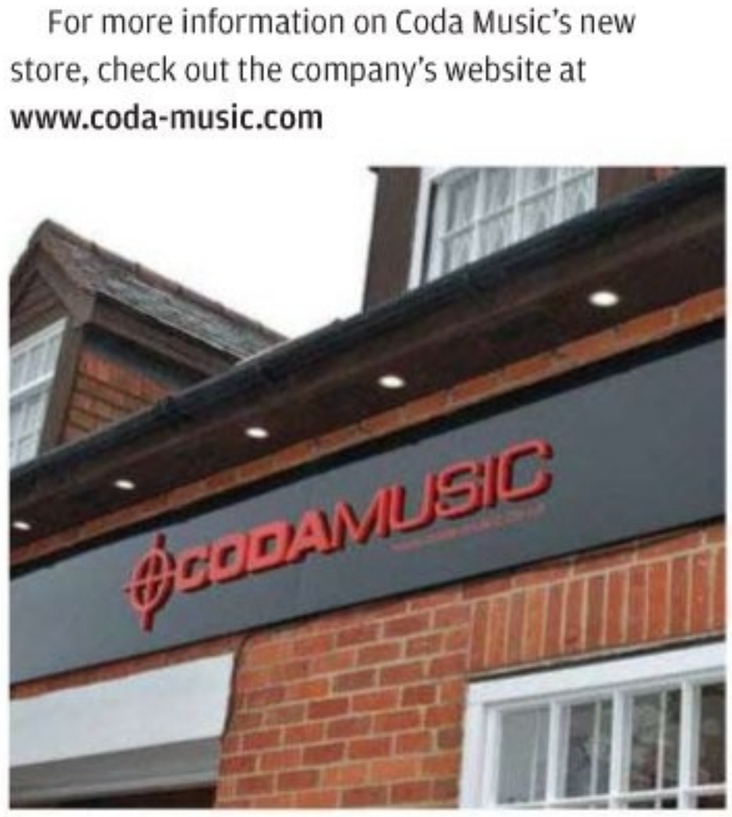
Coda Music, one of the UK's largest musical instrument retailers, has opened the doors on a new two-floor acoustic-only store. The Coda Acoustic shop is only metres away from the company's existing site, which will continue to stock electrics and amps, in Stevenage, Hertfordshire. It offers a huge variety of acoustics from brands such as Martin, Taylor, Collings, Lowden, Bedell, Dobro, Gibson, Ibanez, National, Ovation, Gretsch, Recording King, Guild, Sigma, Fender, Smith & Young and Takamine.

The acoustic store is accompanied by a new warehouse facility nearby, and features solid wood floors and walls and a relaxed shopping environment so players can try out acoustics away from the noise of amplified instruments.

Coda MD Chris Jones said: "In our current store, we're so pushed for space that we can only display a fraction of our acoustic stock that appears on our website. I think that our acoustic customers deserve more."

For more information on Coda Music's new store, check out the company's website at **www.coda-music.com**





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PAUL RIGHT NOW

Though Paul Kossoff died in 1976, aged just 25, his blues-rock playing and distinctive vibrato continue to influence guitarists across the globe. We analyse his '59 Gibson Les Paul Standard in unprecedented detail

Story and photography **Steve Clarke**

I was in a covers band in the late 70s and the North East of England was like a second home: we must have played every venue three times over. I remember the thrill of playing songs by Free, such as *All Right Now* or *Wishing Well*. To say Paul Kossoff was an inspiration and influence on me is an understatement. I recently returned to the North East for perhaps the last chance to get close to a truly iconic instrument that belonged to the legendary guitarist – his '59 Les Paul Standard. 2012 saw Gibson pay tribute to it with 100 hand-aged replicas and 250 VOS versions and now, thanks to the generosity of its owner Arthur Ramm, we can take a close look at the original...

Arthur's band, Beckett, supported Free in Newcastle in the early 1970s; it was the night before Free were to split. Kossoff threw his 1959 Les Paul Standard into the air, breaking the neck, and walked off the stage. In the dressing room, Kossoff spotted Arthur's refinished 1968 Goldtop. Arthur was out of the room, so Kossoff's roadie went to look for him. Arthur returned to find Kossoff with the Goldtop around his neck. He asked to borrow it. When he came off stage, the Free guitarist told Arthur his guitar was lovely and asked if he wanted to swap. Arthur said "well, you've broken yours!" to which Kossoff replied, "I've got this other one" and pointed to a case containing the stripped-finish 'Burst used at the Isle of Wight in 1970. Arthur told Kossoff that if he got the broken one fixed he would prefer that.

Arthur kept the Isle of Wight guitar for many months while waiting for the other 'Burst to be repaired. One night in Hamburg, his roadie put it in the case and closed only one latch. They were walking out of the club when suddenly the case opened and the guitar fell out onto the cobbled street. Arthur looked at his roadie and said "what's one more dent?"

When his sunburst Les Paul was fixed, Kossoff decided he wanted to keep it. Arthur went to London to return the stripped-finished Les Paul in exchange for his own, but they kept in touch and met up whenever Kossoff was in the North East. The sunburst Les Paul went on to be used by Phil Manzanera of Roxy Music on The Old Grey Whistle Test. Kossoff had swapped the sunburst Les Paul for a black, three-pickup Custom belonging to John Porter, the bassist in Roxy Music, who then loaned the 'Burst to Manzanera. Kossoff eventually got it back, and used it in his new band Back Street Crawler. After Kossoff passed away in 1976, Arthur bought this amazing guitar for £700 and he still owns it today. Join us as we take a close look at one of the best of the best... >

Opening the lid of the battered case is a special moment

Opening the case

The guitar is brought to me in a case that has seen better days, and opening the lid in this well-lit room is a heart-stopping moment of nostalgia and awe: it's a well-photographed guitar, after all. It has faded to what many Les Paul aficionados would call a Lemon Burst, but when we go outside with it, sunlight reveals just how much of the original red is still present on the outer edges of the top. It has the most stunning flame; even in black and white pictures, it's still breathtaking. Before I lay it on the table, I weigh it; 8.68lbs. There is obviously a lot of wear on the front of the guitar and, interestingly, just under the treble strings, the pattern of wear is very similar to the stripped finish Isle of Wight Les Paul. This tells you much about the player's

Paul Kossoff's guitar, up close and personal. It really doesn't get much better than this...

right-hand technique, as this is where his fingers would have made contact with the guitar – not necessarily his plectrum.

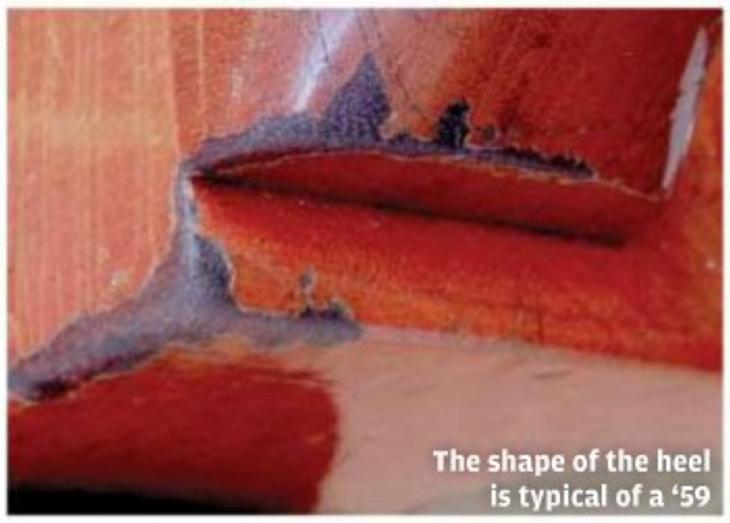
Just behind the tailpiece, there's a small cluster of dents and scratches where the strings would have been fed through the tailpiece and hit the top of the finish. When old lacquer breaks down over the years, what was a small scratch 30–40 years ago begins to age faster. Airborne moisture and temperature fluctuation starts to pull apart, and stretches any defects like a fault line in an earthquake. This is not just the effect commonly known as checking, caused by temperature and movement, but a weak spot in the finish.

It can also manifest by following certain grain patterns in the maple top: they will expand differently than other parts. This is why no two late 50s Les Pauls, or any other guitars for that matter, look the same or wear in the same way. In the early 70s, the neck was repaired and joined around the fifth-fret area by well known repairman Sam Li. The repair looks very good, considering this is an unusual area for a break. The headstock has also been repaired and new lacquer applied, but more on that later.

The instrument has a Honduran mahogany body and neck with a carved 5/8-inch maple top that is beautifully bookmatched. Early mahogany was often lighter and had great tonal properties. Whether you prefer flamed or plain maple is purely a matter of aesthetic preference – the level of figuring doesn't impact on a section of maple's acoustic qualities.

The neck repair is still clearly visible

The trapezoid inlays have shrunk over the decades


The shape of the heel is typical of a '59

"This is such a comfortable neck, with fretwire leaning towards jumbo size; it makes bending notes a breeze"

Neck

The Brazilian rosewood fingerboard's trapezoid inlays now exhibit some shrinkage. The guitar has had a refret in the past with jumbo fret wire and the frets are nicely fitted. The neck is a bit back-bowed and needs slackening off a little, as there is some fret buzz here and there. It could probably use a fret dress, as there are noticeable dead spots on the wire and they are a little too flat.
As the neck was broken, the binding has been replaced and has now shrunk on both the treble and bass sides just in front of the nut, leaving a gap of about 3mm. At the end of the fingerboard, the piece of plastic joining the outer edges is not flush.

At the back of the neck, where the damage was done, it looks like a scarf joint repair and is very good, with no bumps to be felt when you place your hand over it. It has had a respray from the mid section up to the headstock in a red lacquer that's not close in colour to the original other half. The headstock also sustained some damage when Kossoff launched it through the air, so that too has had a respray.

What screams at me from a guitar tech's point of view is that the Gibson headstock logo inlay has had a piece of tape cut out and stuck over it before the lacquer was applied during the repair, so as not to obscure the logo with black lacquer. When the tape was removed, it inevitably left a rectangular groove around the logo, which could easily have been avoided; even today, this could still be corrected by first making it level and then ageing it in sympathy with the rest of the guitar. It would look great and wouldn't need any new lacquer. I can understand trying to preserve original paintwork and hardware when it has aged naturally over the years, but once a job has been partly done, my attitude would usually be that if something can be improved, why not do it?

Originally, the machineheads would have been Klusons, but they're now gold-plated Grovers, which have lost most of their plating but work really well and turn smoothly. The neck feels great: not too big nor too slim, like a 1960 Les Paul might be. The heel is typical of a '59; although I've read that because this instrument lost its serial number it could be a '58, '59 or '60, there are some clues to help narrow down the date. Firstly, '58 Les Pauls don't usually have such flamed tops and can be quite plain. The necks are bigger in the hand, and the heels are larger too, but exceptions do exist. '59 Les Pauls started to have slightly more rounded and slimmer necks with smaller heels, and more appeared with flame tops with a variety of striking effects. Looking at a colour photo of Paul Rodgers playing this guitar backstage in 1972, you can see the beautiful sunburst finish it had originally, with plenty of red pigment visible. '58 Les Pauls had a red pigment that was generally darker, more like Merlot. In early 1960, Gibson finally sorted out its fading red pigment problem but the resulting guitars took on what was known as the Tomato Soup look. This was quite an intense red, very bright and not subject to as much fading. The Kossoff guitar has faded into a sort of Lemon Burst with just a slight hint of red: it's a classic '59 look.

Nut

The nylon nut has been installed at an awkward forward angle with a visible gap that could sap tone away from the strings. The type of nylon that Gibson used is called Nylon 6-6. It's easy to work with and has the benefits of reducing friction and helping tuning stability. Today, the nut it would benefit from recutting, but the strings clear the first fret without much rattle. The nut width is 43mm, and at the 16th fret I take a measurement of 55mm. Arthur shows me the original nylon nut, now broken near the bass end, although not completely split. >

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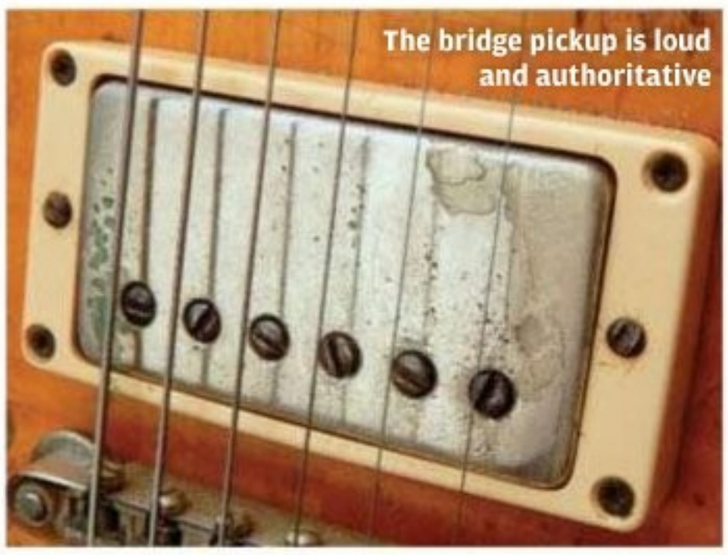
Note the awkward nut angle


The bridge pickup is loud and authoritative

Natural wear can reveal much about a player's technique

The bridge isn't original, but it was almost certainly Kossoff's retrofit

"The bridge has been on the guitar since Arthur bought it, so Paul Kossoff played it with this unit fitted"

Bridge

The bridge isn't an original tune-o-matic ABR1; this unit has the retaining wire that stops the saddles falling out, though the bottom E saddle is more worn and not bevelled, as the other screw heads are. Originally, they would have been nickel-plated brass. The bridge has been on the guitar since Arthur bought it, so Kossoff played it with this bridge fitted and was probably responsible for having it installed. It's likely that when the guitar was hurled by Kossoff in 1972, the saddles fell out on the stage and were lost, so the bridge with the retaining wire was fitted.

These bridges started to appear in 1962. Here, it sits on two threaded posts that fit nice and tightly, and you can turn the guitar upside down and it won't fall off – there were brilliant tolerances used by Gibson in those days, delivering huge tone reward for this engineering. The tailpiece is the original, lightweight aluminium unit, and it looks great on this guitar.

Pickups

I take out the bridge pickup first, and underneath is a PAF sticker attached to a nickel silver base plate with four nickel Phillips round-head screws that secure the bobbins: brass screws appeared later.

The pickup cover, which is also nickel silver, has worn considerably in the treble string area. When Kossoff was using the guitar in his band Back Street Crawler, the covers were removed. Both pickups have black bobbins, and this is possibly another clue to its year of manufacture. PAFs originally had black bobbins and approximately five thousand turns of 42 gauge plain enamel-coated copper wire, but during 1959 the company that produced the bobbins ran out of black pigment, and soon after combinations of black and white (zebra), or double white, started to appear. All black was reinstated in July 1960 at the time when the Tomato Soup colour was the norm.

I'm pretty sure this guitar is an early '59, probably in the 9-280 to 9-300 range. I've seen a '59 in this number range, and although not accurate in a chronological sense, it can give batch information on the output Gibson used. I've also seen this number range on another Les Paul that could have come off the same billet as the Kossoff guitar. It, too, had black-bobbin humbuckers. If this guitar was a 1960, the neck would be slim and there would usually be more red left in the finish.

I remove the neck pickup and can see another PAF sticker and long neck tenon, and on the left side there is a small gap where the tenon sits under the pickup. This may have opened up from the impact of the incident in 1972, when the neck was broken. Amazingly, but typically for a Les Paul joint, it didn't break in the neck-to-body transition area.

I can also see the 5/8-inch maple cap here, as well as the original red pigment under >

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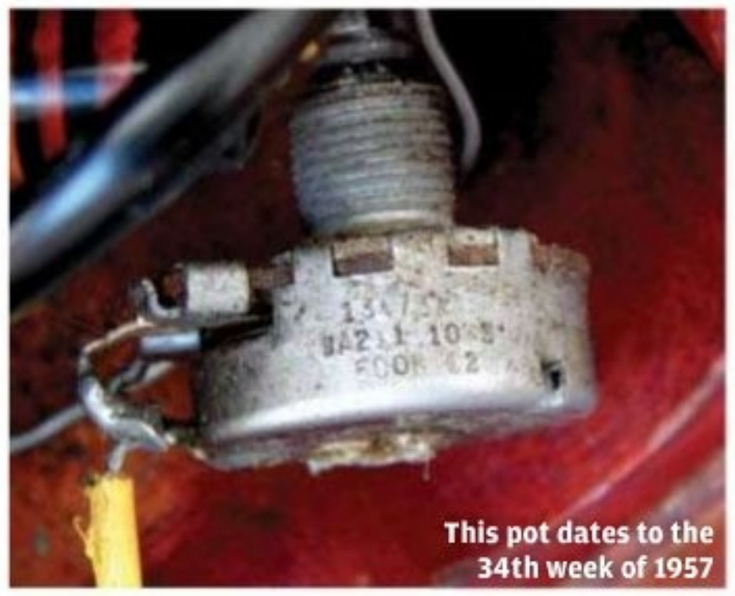
Removing the neck pickup reveals the extent to which the finish has faded

The long neck tenon is visible in the pickup cavity

Early Sprague bumble bee capacitors in situ



This pot dates to the 34th week of 1957

"Removing the control plate, I can immediately see some solder work in the bridge volume pot area"

the pickup surround. The pickup cover has been put back on, too.

The pickup surrounds are original. The bridge pickup surround measures 3/8-inch to ½-inch near the bridge, and has 'M69' and the numeral 8 on the treble string side. The bass side has 'MR-490' embossed into the plastic, with a letter looking like an H on top of an I next to it. The neck surround measures 5/32-inch to ¼-inch and has 'M69' and the number 7 on it, and opposite are the numbers 491. Fakes and repros tend to miss detail on the funnels in each corner, which have a small gap, but the fakes – especially – have the funnels moulded into the corners. The pickup surround screws are original.

Control cavity

Removing the control plate, I can immediately see some solder work in the bridge volume pot area. The ground wire that connects the top of the tone pot control has lifted, so I re-solder it, even though it is unlikely to cause any real problems as everything else is secure. I lift out the volume and tone controls for the bridge pickup and notice the volume pot has been replaced in the past, but the 500k tone control is original and is made by Centralabs.

The number at the side of the tone control is 134734, making the date of this pot the 34th week of 1957. It does not mean that the guitar was made then, only that the pot was manufactured at that time. Like Fender, Gibson would buy large stocks of these components, which can be older than the guitar. I've seen a '62 Strat with '59 pots: nothing is absolute. These late 50s Centralabs were a zinc bushing/split-shaft type; the neck pickup control pots are also original, but I leave them in as they are really stuck fast! I certainly don't want to cause any damage to these old control knobs, so I move on. The Switchcraft toggle is original, but the cap has been replaced.

Both volume and tone controls are linked with Sprague bumble bee capacitors (.022, 400v). These are the early ones, which are the paper-in-oil capacitor style, with a small seal tube at the end, which you would see on the first batch from around the mid-50s to around the end of the decade. The second type look similar, but have no seal at the end and became the Mylar cap. Of course, you will still see crossovers from these changeover years, but a late 1960 Les Paul with the first type would be less common. The jack socket plate also looks to be original, with slightly >

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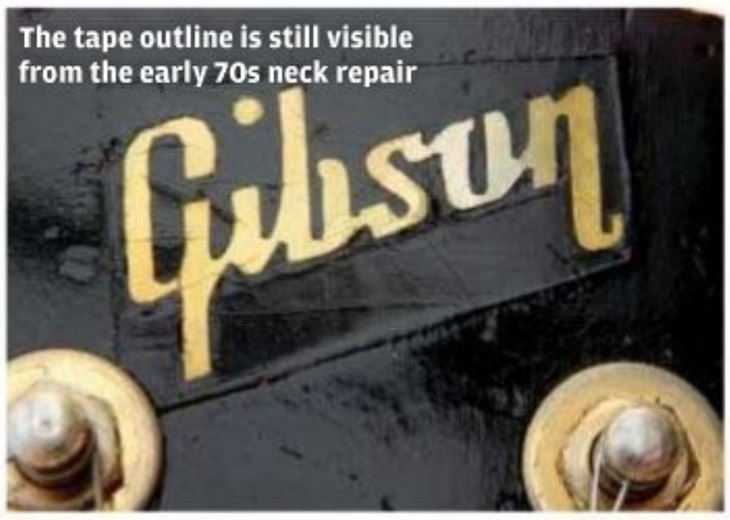
The jack socket plate is original

Wear behind the tailpiece from decades of string changes



The tape outline is still visible from the early 70s neck repair

> "With overdrive, there's a classic bark with the authority to cut through; this is one hell of a loud pickup!"

rounder corners. The control knobs are gold barrel (speed knobs), replacing the original bonnet-style knobs, but can still be seen in early publicity pictures of Free.

Sound

On plugging in, the bridge pickup has lots of attack and is not too bright, but still edgy through the clean channel of a small Fender combo. Quick chord changes with open strings give a real shimmer to the notes, with excellent balance; with overdrive, there's a classic bark with the authority to cut through any mix: this is one hell of a loud pickup!

The middle position doesn't overwhelm, instead it gives a full midrange sound with just enough bass.

Switching to the neck pickup and it's creamy and full of depth: a wonderful wailing blues tone. This guitar has such a comfortable neck, with frets leaning towards jumbo size – it makes bending notes a breeze.

The case

I don't usually mention cases, but this one has a nice story. It's called a California Girl, or Cali Girl for short, has five latches and is well used. It was given that name, apparently, because of its curvy shape. The Cali Girl was made by Stone Case Co, one of three supply companies dealing with Gibson in the early 50s: other names were Lifton and Victoria. Gaffer tape holds the lower lid section together. The damage on the case resulted from a fire at a gig, when the roadie had to run back into the building to save this guitar and others before the fire really took hold. Unbelievably, the roadie then went back into the burning building and retrieved this case, which was on fire when he found it! You can see from the pink interior at the headstock end where it was burnt, and a new section was put on the top of the lid because of the fire damage. It's incredible to think that Kossoff had the same case all that time, travelling to different countries with it without any mishaps.

The earliest photograph I can find of this guitar is from October 1970 at the Imperial College, London. I found a really good black and white picture that appeared in a book called *The Million Dollar Les Paul* – but it wasn't dated. So I contacted Jan Persson, the photographer, to ask for any information he may have had. He kindly replied and told me that he took the picture in December 1970 at the KB Hallen gig in Copenhagen. It would be pure speculation to suggest what songs this guitar has been played on, but it's very likely to have been used on the album *Free At Last*.

The fact that Kossoff had this guitar up until 1976 is testament that he liked it. Kossoff swapped his black three-pickup Les Paul Custom for Eric Clapton's 1958 darkburst Les Paul on the 1969 Blind Faith tour, and it has been said that he used the darkburst to record *All Right Now*. The song was recorded at Trident Studios on 11 January, 1970 and released in May, but on Top Of The Pops Kossoff used the stripped-finish Les Paul that he bought in Spring 1969 before the recording. There is also a picture of Kossoff using this guitar in the studio, so we don't know for sure. There's video footage of Free's *The Stealer* in which a sunburst Les Paul is used, although it is difficult to line up any clues because of the brief shots, but there is a chance it is this one. A black and white promo video of Free playing *All Right Now* shows Kossoff using this guitar, and we know he played it at the KB Hallen gig in 1970, too.

Summary

It's been an absolute pleasure to study in detail and play this most historic guitar. Paul Kossoff has been an inspiration to so many guitarists, and he continues to find a place in the hearts of players who realise that the effective construction of a solo is often more about breathing space and the notes you leave out. Kossoff had a remarkable ability to inhabit the spaces between Paul Rodgers' vocals without going too far, thus producing the most emotive playing with an intense vibrato, that to this day makes him stand apart from the fast and furious.

Steve Clarke is an experienced guitar tech who can be contacted via www.famousfrets.com or at stacmusic@yahoo.co.uk

Kossoff's well-loved California Girl case, made by Stone Case Co

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READER BOARDS

An obsession with posting pictures and videos of his guitars, amps and pedals has seen **SAM ATKINS** accumulate over 3,000 Instagram followers. We get the skinny on his favourite toys...

KIT LIST

Sam Atkins

- **PEDALS (IN ORDER)** JHS Pedals Little Black Buffer, TC Electronic PolyTune 2 Noir, Strymon Deco, JHS Pedals Twin Twelve, JHS Pedals Warble Tron, Keeley Psi Fuzz, Earthquaker Devices Bit Commander, Caroline Guitar Company Kilobyte, Old Blood Noise Endeavors Black Fountain Delay, Old Blood Noise Endeavors Procession Reverb, Catalinbread Valcoder tremolo, Catalinbread Talisman plate reverb, Xotic Limited Edition EP Booster, Boss RC-1 Loop Station
- **PATCH CABLES** Lava Cables Mini Coil
- **POWER SUPPLY** Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 4x4
- **'BOARD TYPE** Pedaltrain PT-2

HEAR IT HERE...

instagram.com/samatkins78

What inspired this setup?

"My inspiration when it comes to pedalboard layouts changes weekly, if not daily! That's why I use Lava Cables Mini Coil patch cables, because they can 'size' to any configuration and stretch the length of a large pedalboard. If a song, band or sound piques my interest at any given time, I will reorganise a pedalboard to capture 'that' sound as closely as possible. This time, I especially wanted a 'board that could give me classic rock sounds, dirty psychedelic fuzz tones, ethereal and unusual reverb and delay-drenched soundscapes. Imagine that Led Zeppelin met The Stooges, slept with 13th Floor Elevators, had an affair with The Black Keys and produced offspring that resembled The Temperance Movement!"

Tell us a little about the journey...

"I love modern pedals as much as my vintage pedal collection, and at present this particular 'board has everything I need, from clean to dirty to gnarly, and all the way into space with layered reverb and delay. I enjoy layering sounds of differing intensities and tone, so a marriage between shimmering chords layered with spluttery lead notes to crunchy 'bass' lines... This 'board most definitely achieves that goal! The current setup was brought together by hitting YouTube, Instagram, guitar forums, magazines – such as your good selves! – and manufacturers' websites. I like to vacuum up as much information as I possibly can before hitting the 'buy' button."

Is there anything else you are looking to add?

"I have a thing for vintage echo units, and own several WEM Copicats and a Maestro EP-3. The one missing from my collection is a Binson Echorec. I would need to sell a kidney to get one of those, though! My pedal collection currently includes around 80 one-off, mass-produced and boutique effects units; as long as talented people keep producing exciting pedals, then I'll want to get my hands on them!"

What guitars and amps do you use?

"I have a range of vintage and reissue Gibson and Fender guitars, including an R8 and R9, a '69 Les Paul Deluxe, a '64 Mustang, several Telecasters and a 2014 Firebird. Amps-wise, I use a 2014 Supro 1624T Dual-Tone, a Fender '68 Custom Princeton Reverb and a 1965 WEM HR30 – amongst others."

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"I seriously suffer from GAS, and I'm very easily led by good, effective demo videos and marketing! As my guitar playing ability has increased over the years, so too has my awareness of just how effectively a good guitar pedal can unlock your creative process."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR 'BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, either post a picture on our Facebook page via this link **http://bit.ly/showusyourpedalboard** or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Andy Timmons

The virtuoso guitarist talks us through some of the diverse influences on his playing

As guitarist for hard rockers Danger Danger, Andy Timmons sold more than a million records worldwide and toured with the likes of Kiss, Extreme and Alice Cooper. Over the years, the Ibanez signature artist has established a reputation for impeccable tone and taste via a wide variety of session work and even an album of instrumental Beatles reworkings in the shape of *Andy Timmons Band Plays Sgt. Pepper*. Timmons – for a time also a student of classical and jazz guitar – is a multi-faceted player and a respected clinician, whose musical taste reveals a love of melody and songcraft as much as instrumental technique. Visit **www.andytimmons.com** for tour dates, guitar lessons and updates from this supremely talented guitarist.

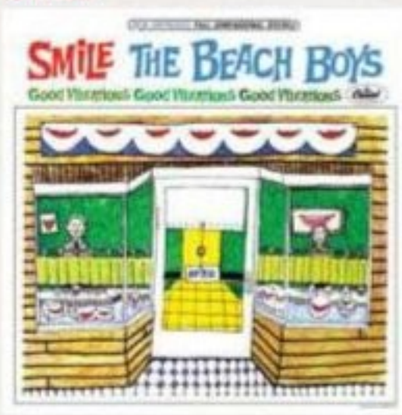
The Beatles
MEET THE BEATLES!

"I am a certifiable Beatles geek. My earliest musical memory is the [US] flipside of the *I Want To Hold Your Hand* single, *I Saw Her Standing There*. My favourite part was when they weren't singing. I didn't know what a guitar solo was, I just loved the sound. This probably explains why I love a wet guitar sound, thanks to George Harrison's reverb-drenched tone."

Kiss
ALIVE!

"These were the first songs and solos I taught myself to play by ear. Ace Frehley was a truly great player, though he never got the respect he deserved, likely due to the critics naysaying the band based on the makeup and theatrics. His style was a perfect amalgamation of all the great British blues-rock players in well-composed and easily digestible solos."

The Beach Boys
SMILE



"Everything you need to know about melody, emotion, songwriting and advanced creativity is here. Brian Wilson to me is the greatest songwriter, singer and producer of all time. Nobody moves me as much as this man. Even as early as *In My Room*, *Surfer Girl* and *She Knows Me Too Well*, his aching falsetto touches that special place in your heart."

Toto
HYDRA

"At a crucial point in my development as a player, I heard Steve Lukather on a Boz Scaggs track called *Breakdown Dead Ahead* and was blown away. I sought out anything I could find that he had recorded. Luke's melodic sense and command of time and placement has made him probably my biggest influence. His playing on *White Sister* is one my favourites."

Joe Satriani
SURFING WITH THE ALIEN

"As great as Joe's playing is on this record, what made it stand out and become so successful were the songs! Guitar playing and instrumentals were rapidly becoming more about speed and technique, which to a point is incredibly exciting, but Joe was able to present his abilities in a much more palatable format than anyone else had at that stage."

Miles Davis
WE WANT MILES

"I stumbled upon Mike Stern thanks to *Saturday Night Live* around 1981. The musical guest was Miles Davis, who I knew nothing about. I see this straggly-looking guitar player with an old Strat, who proceeded to rip my head off! I had been playing a bit of jazz, but I hadn't heard anyone mix the jazz vocabulary with such incredible bluesy/Hendrix-y tone and attitude."

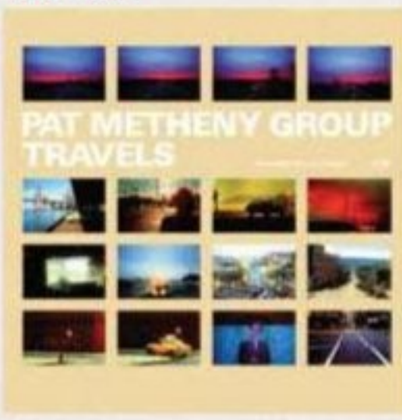
Eric Johnson
AH VIA MUSICOM

"Released back in 1990, *Ah Via Musicom* is the record that set the benchmark for what I – and many others – consider to be great guitar tone and great guitar playing. It's also an incredibly musical record. *Trademark*, in particular, is perfection! One of a very few 'guitar records' that bears repeated listens."

Jeff Beck
EMOTION & COMMOTION

"It's the ballads here, folks! Two Jeff Buckley tunes, plus *Over The Rainbow* and an incredible reading of *Nessun Dorma*. The opener, *Corpus Christi Carol*, is worth the price of admission. What Jeff achieves with one note is stunning. His control of touch, pitch, vibrato, volume makes him the most expressive guitarist of our time. He's what I want to be when I grow up."

Pat Metheny Group
TRAVELS



"Pat's playing and composing are a huge influence. His command of time is a factor in why he appeals to me. That's not to suggest his playing is metronomic – quite the contrary. When a player has such great command of time, he or she becomes free to place the note where they want. This is so important in the feel and emotion of the musical phrase."

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THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

“At my age, I need to try to take it as far as I possibly can”

The Modfather’s 12th solo album finds the former Jam and Style Council man refusing to rest on his creative laurels and continuing to push stylistic boundaries. He tells *G&B* about the record’s origins, his guitar preferences and his future plans...

Story **Jeff Slate**

“Sorry about that, it just cut off,” Paul Weller apologises at the outset of our interview. He’s ringing me back after our first call went dead just as I was recounting one of our first meetings, in the early 90s. Given Weller’s reputation, I thought perhaps he’d hung up on me. “Nah, don’t be ridiculous,” Weller assures me. “It’s all good.”

Weller is calling from a dressing room in Berlin, in the middle of a brief European theatre tour ahead of the release of his 12th studio solo album, *Saturns Pattern*, having just wrapped up a “cracking” soundcheck.

“We went on a bit longer than usual ’cos it just sounded so good,” he confesses.

It’s not just soundchecks that are cracking these days for Weller. He’s in the midst of a creative purple patch that began with 2008’s *22 Dreams*, released on the eve of his 50th birthday, and continued with *Wake Up The Nation* (2010) and *Sonik Kicks* (2012). Each was heralded for its far-reaching production techniques and songwriting, and Weller’s apparent lack of fear in trying just about anything, stylistically, he could think to tackle.

All the while, Weller kept up a gruelling touring schedule, and even found time enough to launch two seasons of a men’s clothing line – Real Stars Are Rare – and compile a book called *Into Tomorrow*, made up of photographs from his solo rebirth during the 90s Britpop era through to the present day. He also got married and had twins – John Paul and Bowie – to compliment his five other children.

However busy he is, Weller’s happy to talk about his creative process, songwriting techniques and his gear. At a time when a lot of his contemporaries have stopped making new music, or certainly new music that’s remotely different from what they’ve done before, Weller continues to push himself >

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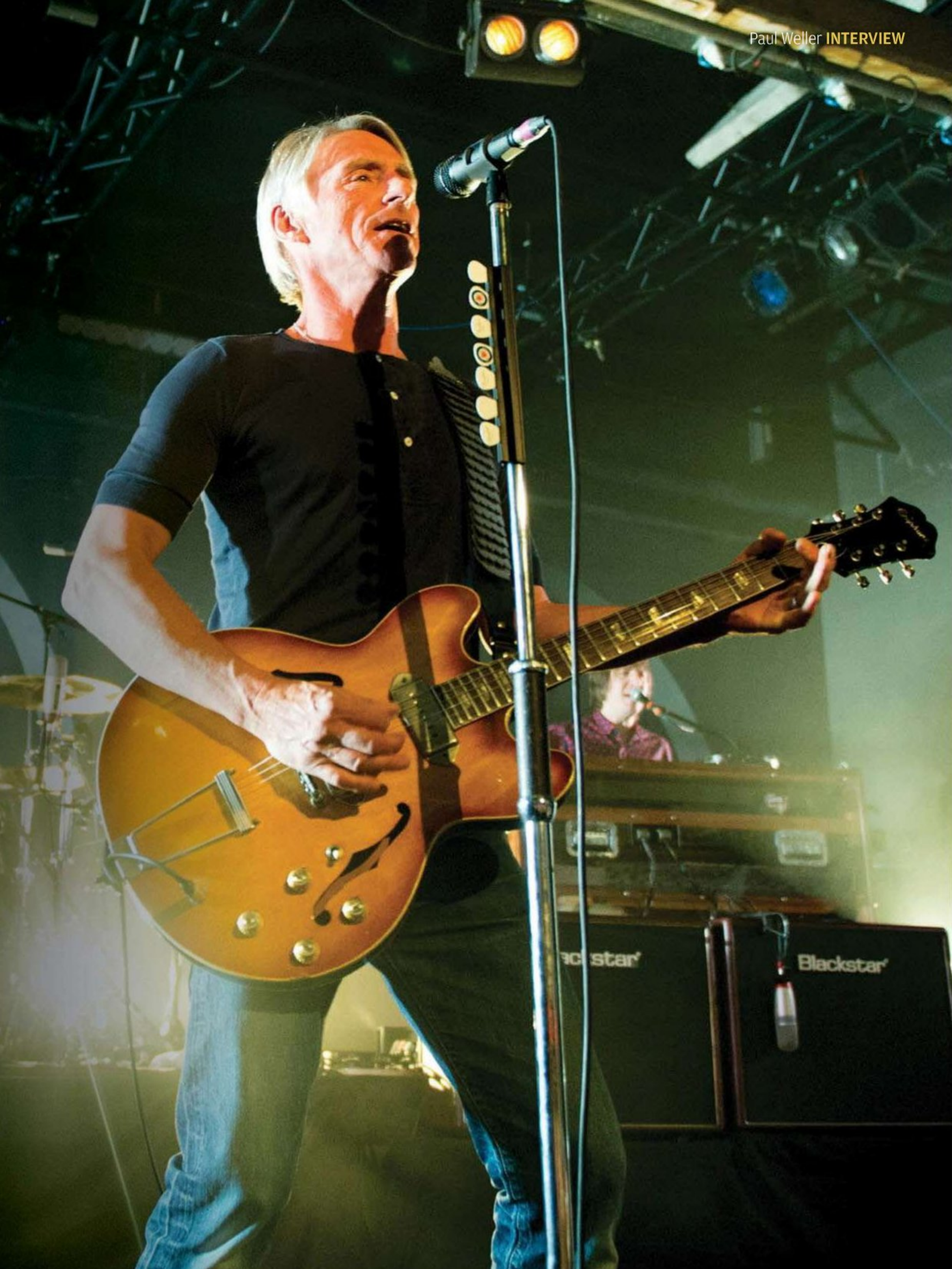
Blackstar
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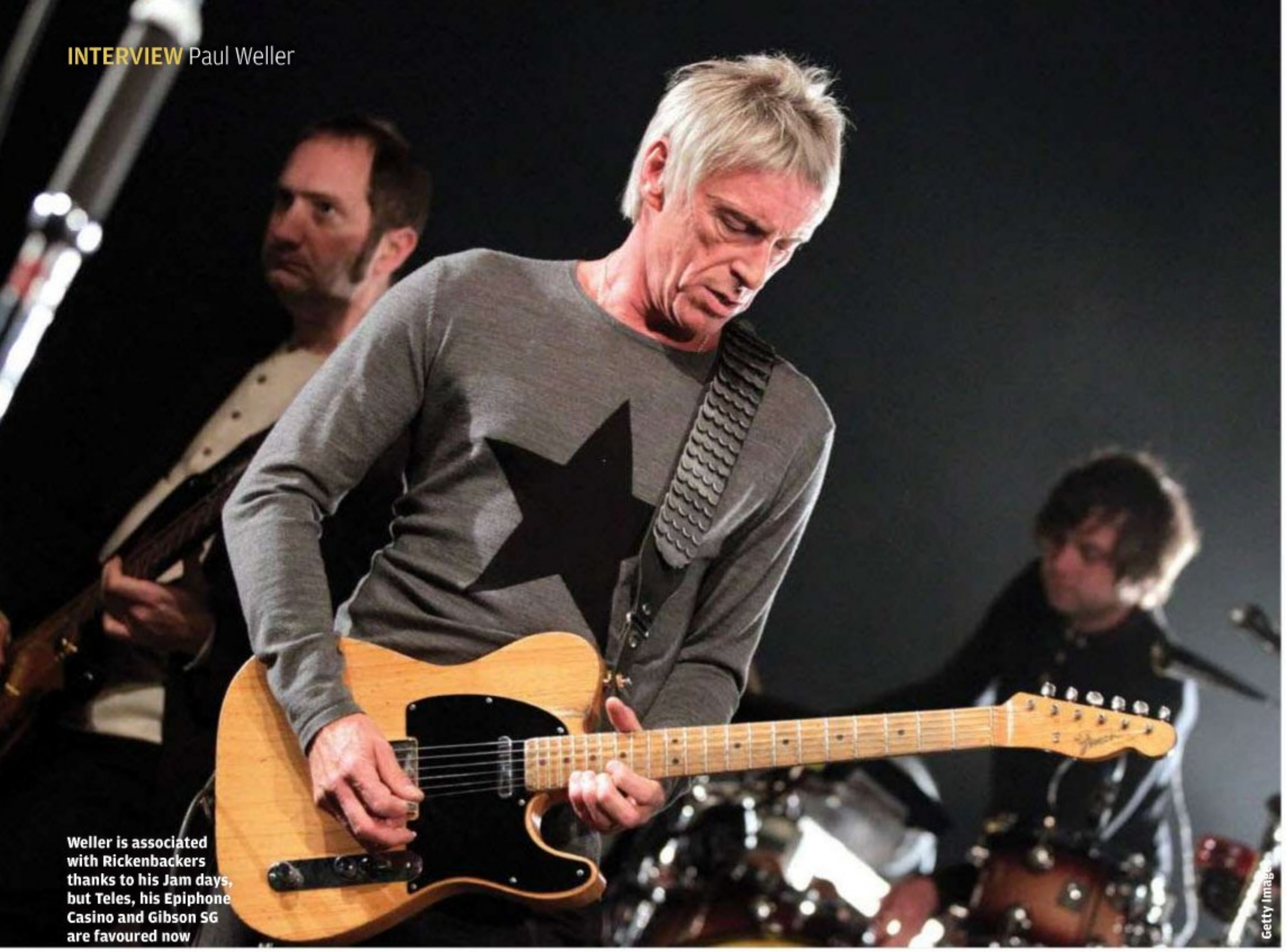


Weller is associated with Rickenbackers thanks to his Jam days, but Teles, his Epiphone Casino and Gibson SG are favoured now

Getty Images

to release new material and challenge his creative process. We ask what fuels this spirit of restless invention, and whether – ultimately – he makes records for himself.

"Obviously, I do it because I love doing it," he says. "But as a writer, you're always looking to see what else you can write. Can you make this better? Can you do the quirkiest piece of work you've ever done? All those questions, really. It's a never-ending quest, and I don't think that you ever stop until you're finished."

We wonder whether Weller feels the need to make concessions to commercial accessibility in pursuit of that quest, or is testing creative new ground his sole concern?

"Well, essentially, I'm just doing what I need to do, which is to write and make music. That's at the very core of what I'm about really. I'm quite happy living life like that. I still feel I've got loads of music inside me. Whenever I feel like that, I want to keep making it and see where it goes. I just think it's fascinating, really, the twists and turns of this whole path. But yeah, I just want to keep on making more of it.

"The commercial aspect of it [the current musical landscape], it's anyone's guess, man. If I had the choice between selling a thousand or a million, I'd much rather sell a million, because it means I can get more money. Outside of that, I've never really thought about what's commercial. It's just... I hope it's all popular with people, because that's what you should be doing. But in terms of whether it's commercial, who knows, man? I don't know who knows what's commercial or not. I certainly don't."

When we were on hold, awaiting our audience with the Modfather, the record company had short snippets of its current hit songs playing on the line. Weller doesn't sit neatly alongside some of his label-mates, so do these "hits" offend his aesthetic? "I probably don't judge it like that, I hope," he replies. "I probably judge it solely on its merit. Or maybe not its merit, but on whether it affects me or not. Probably, a vast majority of the charts means nothing to me whatsoever, but I'd have said the same thing about the 70s and 80s, as well. There was tons and tons of shit out there, but you had to look for something that meant something to you. I don't know if it's become too different.

"I don't think you can include the 60s, because it was such a different time. But there's some great music out there. It's inspiring to me to hear great music, whether that's new or old, and it inspires me to go make great music. So I don't slavishly follow what's going on, but at the same time I'm interested to hear what's going on as well."

Saturns Pattern continues an adventurous approach to production that was present on *22 Dreams* and *Wake Up The Nation* – and even more so on *Sonik Kicks*. We observe that the songs don't necessarily feel as if Weller could still sit down and play them on an acoustic guitar or a piano, yet in a previous interview, he told us that was how his songwriting always began. It appears no longer to be the case.

"None of the new songs started out at that level, for sure," Weller explains, with even the more traditional-sounding *Where I Should Be* resulting from sessions of sonic experimentation.

"It was all kinds of improvised and made up on the spot, to be honest with you. Because I had loads of songs, I had, I guess, six or eight tunes I'd written at home, but I chose not to use those. They didn't feel right for the album I wanted to make. There wasn't anything pre-planned on the album, it was just us experimenting with things to see what happened. So we ended up writing a lot of it in the studio."

The latter approach became the norm during Weller's work with former producer Simon Dine, but he stresses that he still enjoys adopting a back-to-basics approach for some of his writing.

> "I've got loads of music inside me. I want to keep making it and see where it goes. I think it's fascinating, the twists and turns of this whole path"

"Well, I've worked with both methods. I like doing it like that, but also in a more traditional way, writing at home," says Weller. "It's whatever, really. I haven't got a set plan anymore. Whatever way works. I'm interested in whatever way that is, whatever method. I never really know where I'm going to go. It just takes me, really. I think it depends where I'm at. I always try to find different ways of doing things, just to keep it interesting. I think the really important thing is just to keep an open mind about all of it. There isn't any set way to making music or writing. It's just whatever's in the air at the time. The older you get, the more important it is to stay open-minded, I think, and not look at it as a fixed way of doing things. It's whatever works, man.

"I don't think I'm going to work one way, or this way, or the other way. I'm into whatever, really: working with other people, writing with other people, just seeing where it goes.

"I feel really, at my age now, like I need to go on and try to take it as far as I possibly can, really, to carry on experimenting with other types of music, working in different ways. I think I'm at the right age to do that. I think it's right at my age to try and see what else you can become, as opposed to just doing what's expected of you.

"There is no rulebook. That's the thing of it. We sort of rip it up and don't worry about it. That's the beauty of it, really. Sometimes all the pieces come together and they don't work, but that's OK. You've got to be versatile with things as well. I don't have any career moves or ideas about what my ideas should be. I haven't got a fucking clue. I just work at it from day to day and figure out a way to go along like all human beings do, really. That applies to life, as well."

Weller's desire to challenge himself may also lead to more collaborations and projects with younger artists.

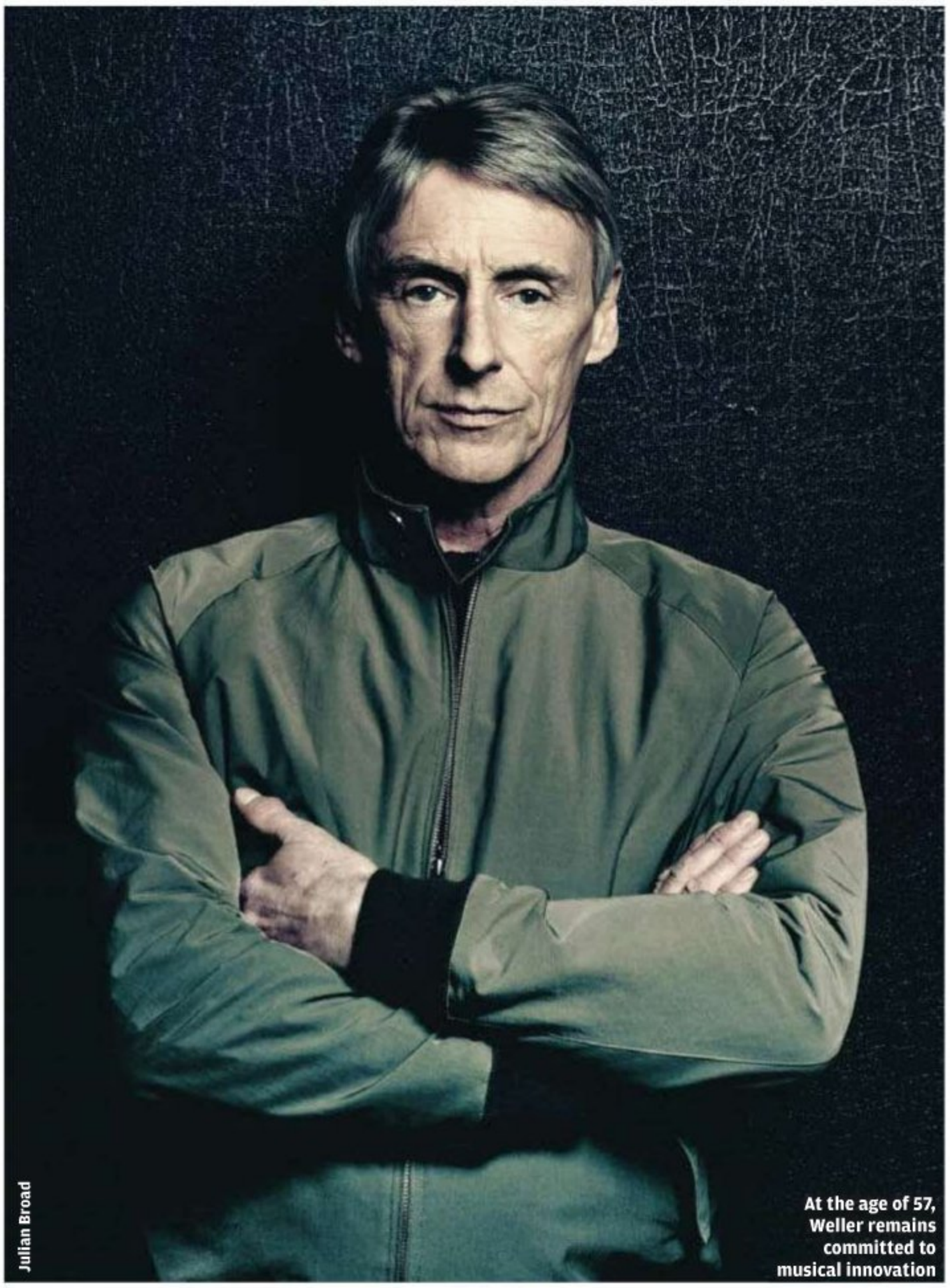
"I really like that and I'd like to do some more," says Weller. "I'd love to do some stuff in the States, as well, but I don't know who with. I'd like too expand my horizons, really."

When asked about his guitars, Weller replies mischievously: "I don't know anything about 'em, but I'm willing to try," before expanding on some of his old favourites – his 60s Epiphone Casino, SG and Tele.

"I've been playing them for god knows how long, but yeah, I know what I need to get out of a guitar, especially my SG," he reflects, despite seemingly forever being associated with the Rickenbackers he played in The Jam, but no longer uses.

"It's been a long time since I played one of them. I think it's because the Casino and SG and Tele are very adaptable," he says. "You can get different tones and sounds out of them between the pickups. They've all got a certain versatility."

How, then, did Weller come to fall in love with the Casino? >



Julian Broad

At the age of 57, Weller remains committed to musical innovation

FUTURE ACOUSTICS

Weller played a 70s Gibson J-45 for many years, and it remains in his collection today. "It's still around. It's languishing in the studio, but it makes an appearance every now and then," says Weller, who penned "five or six" acoustic-based songs in the writing sessions for *Saturns Pattern* that don't appear on the new album. He tells *Guitar & Bass* that these are likely to appear on future releases.

" I think they'll probably come out as like B-sides or bonus tracks, that kind of thing. They're good, not all of them, but some of them. I just didn't want to make an album of acoustic songs. I wanted it to be more electric. But they will be coming out soon, yeah."

Photoshot

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Weller with long-standing friend and collaborator Steve Cradock of Ocean Colour Scene

Getty Images

"By looking at The Beatles in 1966," he admits. "The same reason I bought the SG. I saw George Harrison playing one around *Revolver*. Kind of, 'Good enough for me!'"

And what of acoustic guitars? As one of the most consistently innovative songwriters in rock history, does Weller subscribe to the notion that acoustics have songs in them?

"No," he replies in short. "But I wish I could find one of those ones, then. I've been using these new Guilds recently. They're really nice. I don't know what they cost, but they're really nice guitars. Live as well, they're really nice guitars."

As a guitarist, Weller welcomes the fulsome praise that comes his way from his peers, and has a long-lasting playing relationship with Ocean Colour Scene's Steve Cradock, but he still confesses to some insecurities about his own playing.

"It's a great compliment. It's always nice to have some praise from your peers and fellow musicians," says Weller. "I'm always pleased to hear that. I don't always have an angle, really, on what my playing is like or not. Sometimes, I go through periods where I feel like I'm not really going anywhere, and other times I feel like I'm better than I was 20 years ago. I go up and down a bit with it, really. But hopefully you're just constantly learning.

"The thing with me and Steve is that he's kind of telepathic sometimes. We've played music together for a long time, that's true, but we also talk together about music quite a lot. I think there is a certain thing where we're kind of comfortable and know what we're doing, but at the same time I think we're both trying to move it along a little bit and get more comfortable as well, always getting better. It can also involve not playing as much. Sometimes it's just leaving a bit more space. Whatever it may be, I think we're both conscious of trying to think about what we're doing and whether we can improve it."

Weller, who says he hasn't recorded on tape for "probably 10 years", also acknowledges the importance of studio technology and software such as Pro Tools in keeping his music vibrant and at the cutting edge.

"Yeah, that's pretty incredible, all that. I don't actually work in any of that stuff, I'm relying on other people. But I think some of the edits and arrangements we did on the new album you simply couldn't do on tape. I think this album kind of came into its own through working on Pro Tools.

"We do try layers of stuff. But when you hear the finished thing, you only hear what we kept. There's plenty of things we try and then ditch, to move it along. Different arrangements, different instruments, until we end up with what we've got.

"I think we turned up one day when we were going to start the sessions for *As Is Now*, and we couldn't get any multitrack. There was no tape. I think Ampex had just gone out of business, so you couldn't buy a reel of tape. It was kind of the writing on the wall, really. Tape's so expensive now, as well.

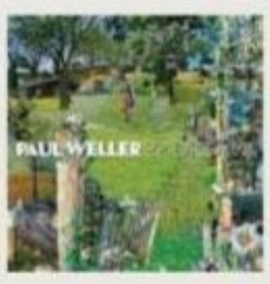
"You don't really have too much choice after a while. I wasn't happy when they said they were going to put one of my albums on a CD 30 years ago. I was really upset. 'What's wrong with records, man?' But look, whatever it is – progress – you you can't stop it anyway. It's difficult, because I love the old analogue sounds, but ultimately your music ends up digitised. We're very conscious of it and try to add as much analogue warmth and intimacy as possible. We all grew up with that. At the same time, it's like any technology: there are always some good bits and some shitty bits. You've got to take the best bits that are most useful to your sonics."

LISTEN UP

PAUL WELLER
Wild Wood (1993)
Weller's second solo album was an introspective, folky gem that saw the Modfather in his best form since The Jam.

PAUL WELLER
Stanley Road (1995)
The finest release of Weller's solo career features the sublime *You Do Something To Me* and contributions from Britpop royalty such as Noel Gallagher.

PAUL WELLER
22 Dreams (2008)
Selected here for a second consecutive issue, *22 Dreams* is a voyage of sonic exploration featuring garage trio Little Barrie.



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Alter Bridge

Guy Pratt
Pink Floyd

Jack Daley
Lenny Kravitz

Jeremy Davis
Paramore

Brian Ray
Sir Paul McCartney

James Johnston
Biffy Clyro

Jah Wobble
Various

Nick Harmer
Death Cab For Cutie

Cubbie Fink
Foster The People

Simon Mitchell
Young Guns

Nate Mendel
Foo Fighters

Pino Palladino
Various

Alex Levine
Gaslight Anthem

Dave Hollingworth
Dorje

Shavo Odadjian
System of a Down

Nick Seymour
Crowded House

Matt Barnes
You Me at Six

Jeremy Pritchard
Everything Everything

Martin Blunt
The Charlatans

James LoMenzo
John Fogarty

Norman Watt-Roy
The Blockheads

Fred Sablan
Queen Kwong

Eric Wilson
Sublime

Cat Popper
PussnBoots

Jerry Meehan
Robbie Williams

Jimmy Ashurst
The Cult

Herman Stephens
Rizzle Kicks

Dougie Poynter
McBusted

Ross Macdonald
1975

John Hassel
The Libertines

Jon Stockman
Karnivool

Ginger Pooley
Gwen Stefani

Rob Malone
David Gray

Gordon Moakes
Bloc Party

Bushers
Madness

JJ Burnel
The Stranglers

Will Farquarson
Bastille

Youth
Killing Joke

Aaron Julison
Kid Rock

Tim Kingsbury
Arcade Fire

Nick O'Malley
Arctic Monkeys

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10 TOP TIPS
Les Claypool

The Primus frontman has been dazzling audiences with his unique bass playing for nearly 30 years. He shares some of his four-string wisdom with us...

Story **Michael Heatley**

1 PRACTISE A LOT WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG

"When you're first learning, practice is extraordinarily important so you can get your technique, the mechanics of it, down. I don't practise as much as I should. I do a little more now because, as I'm getting older, I have to warm up before shows to knock the barnacles off the hull!

"In my youth, the bass was my best friend – it got me through some girl breaking my heart, or whatever was going on. You'd play your blues, play your stresses away. As you move through life, other things take up your time and you don't focus so much – or at least with that passion. If you're just starting out, play your

2 Invest in buying a high-quality instrument

"I didn't have money as a kid, so I spent a lot of years not even having an amplifier. When Primus began, I was playing though our guitarist's spare guitar head. It all started when I met a guy who needed a bass player – that happened a lot back then, because everybody wanted to be Eddie Van Halen! I knew this guy who was selling a bass for $30, but my father took me to Al's Musical Instruments and I got a Memphis P-Bass copy for $150... then spent the summer pulling weeds to pay for it.

"An instrument that's comfortable, fits you and is easy to play is going to take you much further than something that's half-assed and just gets you frustrated."

3 Challenge yourself

"Many years ago, a guy came up to me at a music instrument convention and said, 'You've got a Carl Thompson, look at my Carl Thompson – it's got six strings and it's fretless!' So I had to get one. It's a bear, it's a bitch, it can be a pain in the ass sometimes. I gravitate more towards four strings, because I'm very

comfortable with it, but when I want to challenge myself I get that six-string fretless out. It's a whole different beast. I often say the bass is the crayon I pulled out of the box, and the six-string is a whole different crayon."

4 Practise singing and playing until it's automatic

"Some things fall together easily, other things you just have to force yourself to do. For many years, I didn't consider myself a singer, I didn't think I had the chops. When I first learned *Tommy The Cat*, learning to narrate over the top of it was tough... Singing and playing is a very difficult thing to do, but if you get to where it's a part of your subconscious, you can do it."

5 Play with real live humans

"Playing music is a form of

communication. You can learn how to play *Kashmir* by Led Zeppelin sitting around in your room... but when it comes time to improvise with a drummer and take it somewhere else, what are you going to do?

"With each person you play with, you're going to expand your musical vocabulary and your ability to communicate with another musician. And, subsequently, with the people who are paying attention to it – the audience."

6 Be open-minded in your playing, but above all else serve the song

"For many years, Primus songs started with the bass part, the vocal part. But on the *Green Naugahyde* record, I was insistent that the guys brought in songs, or bits that could be built into songs. So a song called *Jilly's On Smack* was built around the guitar part. If you listen to the bass, it's very different to, say, *Last Salmon Man*, or other songs that started with the bass.

"It's about what's going to make the composition move forward the best it possibly can. If it's going to take playing a bunch of sixteenth notes in the upper register, go for it – if it's going to take playing a walking McCartney-esque part, that's what you need to do."

9 Remember the importance of listening

"A lot of people play their part the best they possibly can. They're hammering their part out, and not listening to everybody else. My favourite players in the world have 'big ears' – (keyboardist) Bernie Worrell has incredible ears. He hears everything and reacts to every little thing. And when you play with someone like that it is spectacular. It just goes back to that conversation thing. You can't just dictate – you have to react and have that person react. That's when you have a glorious conversation... and that's when you have glorious musical interaction."

10 Use YouTube as your tutor

"It's a massive thing – if you want to know how to play a song, you dial it into YouTube and you see one of us guys playing it. Back when I was a kid, you had to go to the show, stand and stare and go 'Oh my God, look at him go!'.

"We've progressed in many ways, whether it's the cost of the instrument, the access to these instruments, access to information, to seeing players play these things... If I want to learn a Larry Graham song, he's there online; someone's filmed him sitting in a room, showing people how."

Getty Images

8 FIND A HERO TO INSPIRE YOU

"I still have heroes; I think it's a wonderful thing. When I first started, Geddy Lee was my hero, and I'm fortunate he's become a good buddy. As a young fellow in my teens, there was nobody superior. Then I stumbled across guys like Stanley Clarke, Larry Graham and Tony Levin.

"I would like to hope I'm a positive influence on people's lives, too. I play this hunk of furniture with strings on it and keep myself entertained while entertaining folks. That's an amazing position to be in!"

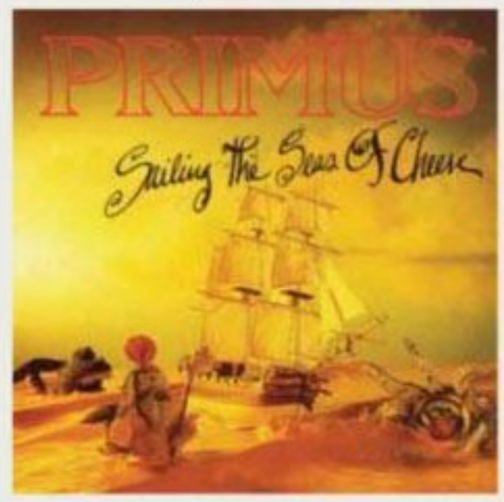
LISTEN UP

PRIMUS

Sailing The Seas Of Cheese

(1991)

Primus's platinum-selling major label debut features the classics *Tommy The Cat* and *Jerry Was A Race Car Driver* along with the marching rhythms of *Those Damned Blue-Collar Tweekers*. Claypool's bass playing is extraordinary throughout and the band have performed the album in its entirety on several occasions, notably at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2012.



"It all started when I met a guy who needed a bass player – that happened a lot back then because everybody wanted to be Eddie Van Halen!"

7 GET THROUGH FALLOW PERIODS BY CHANGING YOUR ROUTINE

"One of the greatest things that happened to me, for my career and my ability, was Primus breaking up in the late 90s. I went out and bought this old motorhome, piled all my favourite musicians in it and went up and down the West Coast playing bars. Not a single Primus song; that's when we did Pink Floyd's *Animals* in its entirety. It was one of the greatest growth periods in my life as a musician. When I came back to Primus years later I was totally refreshed.

"Sometimes, you need to make a change. It can be scarier than hell, but you have to force yourself to be inspired."

Getty Images

Guitar & Bass LEGENDS

Jazz Master

After cutting his teeth in the vibrant Indianapolis music scene, Wes Montgomery became one of the most iconic and influential figures in the history of the guitar. With the help of some of the musicians who knew Wes best, we chart his incredible journey...

Story **David Gallant**

Along with Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian, Wes Montgomery's name is one of the most resonant in the history of jazz guitar. His sound is immediately identifiable. Playing with the flesh of his thumb (and a corn – on his thumb!), Wes created a smooth and sophisticated sound, with full-bodied, mellow tone juiced up with more than a hint of reverb. He was, to many, the embodiment of cool.

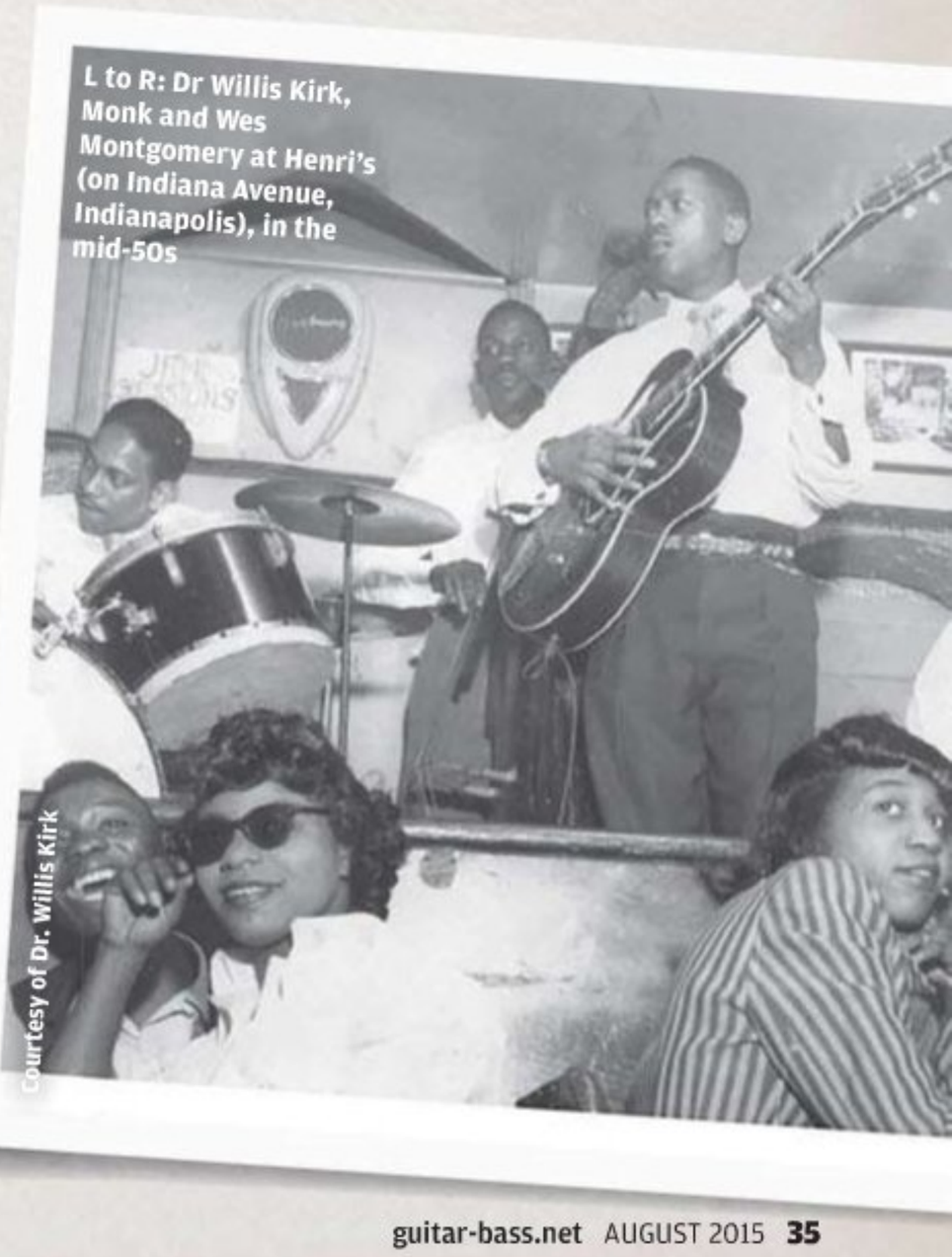
But Montgomery's sound wasn't always so mellow – he came of age in the early 1950s with the birth of bebop, and as a recently released pairing of discs from the American label Resonance Records shows, in those early days Montgomery was stylistically and sonically very much in the mould of Charlie Christian. Drummer Jimmy Cobb recalls: "Wes was influenced by a lot of people, but he once mentioned Charlie Christian. He'd seen CC one time and said that his guitar looked like it was so raggedy that if he went and bought a new guitar he'd have to jump on Charlie Christian right away – that was Wes's sense of humour. He was also influenced by Charlie Parker – everybody was influenced by Parker, he brought a whole new thing to the table, you know?"

Montgomery was also a very committed family man, fathering seven children – who by all accounts he doted on. Supporting such a large family, certainly in the early days, meant that music alone could not be the meal ticket. Life couldn't have been more complete – or perhaps complicated! Time out was limited. Montgomery's home city of Indianapolis had a thriving music scene and he would make the most of the many opportunities it afforded, playing into the early hours at local clubs while holding down a full-time day job in the town's steel foundry. The story goes that Wes was lucky if he saw five hours sleep a night.

Montgomery had come from a large family, through which a strong musical thread flowed. Together with his brothers Monk (on bass) and Buddy (on piano), and Dr Willis Kirk on drums, they formed The Montgomery Brothers band and became a popular act, playing the local clubs in the racially segregated black 'Naptown' area of Indianapolis. They hung out at places such as Henri's and the Hub-Bub off Indiana Avenue. As with many bands, there were personnel changes – and The Montgomery Brothers soon morphed into The Montgomery-Johnson Quintet, augmented by 'Pookie' Johnson on sax and Sonny Johnson (no relation) on drums. This line-up, with Wes and Pookie working together out front, gave the two men the opportunity to experiment with some blistering harmony and unison lines. As Monk commented: "Pookie and Wes played so well together because they dug each other. The guitar and tenor worked out really well. When those guys played ensembles and heads of tunes, the phrasing and everything was so tight that they sounded like one instrument."

> "Pookie and Wes played so well together because they dug each other"
>
> **MONK MONTGOMERY**

Augmenting the line-up with the addition of Pookie Johnson gave the band an extra edge, and an opportunity presented itself to play in the busy downtown area. The Turf Club on 16th was in the >



L to R: Dr Willis Kirk, Monk and Wes Montgomery at Henri's (on Indiana Avenue, Indianapolis), in the mid-50s

Courtesy of Dr. Willis Kirk

GEAR *Wes Montgomery*

- **EARLY YEARS** Gibson ES-175 with P-90s, Fender Super Reverb
- **MID-TERM** Standard Gibson L-5, Standel Super Custom XV, Fender Bandmaster with separate 2x12 cab
- **LATER YEARS** L-5 CES custom models, Fender Twin Reverb

The Bebop Society of Indianapolis in the early 50s: Malcolm Lewis, Buddy Parker, Bill Harris, Maceo Hampton, Wes and Buddy Montgomery and Dr Willis Kirk (hidden)

'white' area of the city and business wasn't good. Mildred Thompson, the owner, wasn't at all keen to have a black group playing at the club and agreed only because the band had become something of a local legend, and she was having to try anything she could in an attempt to keep the joint afloat.

It was a brave move that paid off. The band's residency was to turn the Turf Club's fortunes around, as Buddy Montgomery later recalled: "The jazz people from downtown liked to go to the Turf Club because they didn't have to go to the black clubs." Racism, though, could and still did raise its ugly head. On one occasion, the singer Sarah Vaughan and band leader Count Basie turned up late at the Turf Club after giving a concert at one of the theatres downtown. "These were some heavy folks. The guy at the door stopped them and said: 'No Way!' We saw them coming and were excited that they were going to be there," Buddy added.

"Of course, we had forgotten about the policy, and we see them trying to explain their way in. Frank Foster and Johnny Smith were sitting in with us and it just popped into our minds that we should stop playing."

This is said to have led to something of a stand-off, until the band informed the owner that they were 'through' with playing if the owner didn't let Sarah and Count into the club.

"She had a packed house," said Buddy in an interview before his death in 2009. "Money's a funny thing sometimes. In the end, the owner put a lot of tables together – just for the musicians. We thought we'd be there for a couple of weeks, but we ended up being there for a couple of years."

Wes would also take part in 'after-hours' jam sessions uptown at the Missile Lounge, with Melvin Rhyne on organ and Paul Parker playing drums. As the house trio, their artistry attracted not only local talent, but soon caught the attention of celebrity musicians. It was a visit by Cannonball Adderley in '59 that sealed Wes's signing to Riverside Records.

Word was fast getting around about this cat from Indianapolis who could really play. Wes, however, couldn't read music. Harold Mabern, who later played with Montgomery on his final tour of Europe, remembers working over tunes with Wes, and suggests that he must have had either perfect, or at the very least relative, pitch.

"He could play anything, in any key, at any time," he recalls. "He would say: 'Mabern, play this with me', and he would call the key and I'd play it. It might be the harmony part to what he was playing... whatever way, it was always a challenge. If I didn't know what it was, we would just play it over again.

"We would play it until he felt that he was satisfied with it. You know, you don't need to go to school to learn this music, 'cos this is street music. That's why you can't teach musicians two things. You can't teach them how to swing and you can't teach them how to play the blues. You can either do it or you can't."

> "You can't teach musicians how to swing and how to play the blues. You can either do it or you can't"
>
> **HAROLD MABERN**

L to R: Sonny Johnson, Monk Montgomery (hidden), Pookie Johnson, Wes and Buddy Montgomery at The Turf Club, Indianapolis, in the mid-1950s

Photo: Philip Kahl Courtesy of the Buddy Montgomery estate

It was self-evident that Wes could 'do it', and although the influences of Charlie Christian and Charlie Parker – he could play all of Parker's tunes – were still very much part of his musical vocabulary, he was steadily developing his own style. We hear it on the Resonance album *Echoes of Indiana Avenue*, between the up-tempo and engaging *Diablo's Dance* and the bebop-ish flurry of *Straight, No Chaser*; Wes's rendition of Thelonius Monk's *Round Midnight* finds him in an altogether more introspective and intense mood, teasing out the notes with that mellow tone that would become so much a part of his soundscape. We hear it again, a few tracks later, on Erroll Garner's *Misty*, where Wes gives an early indication of his future path as he airs his chordal octave voicings. >

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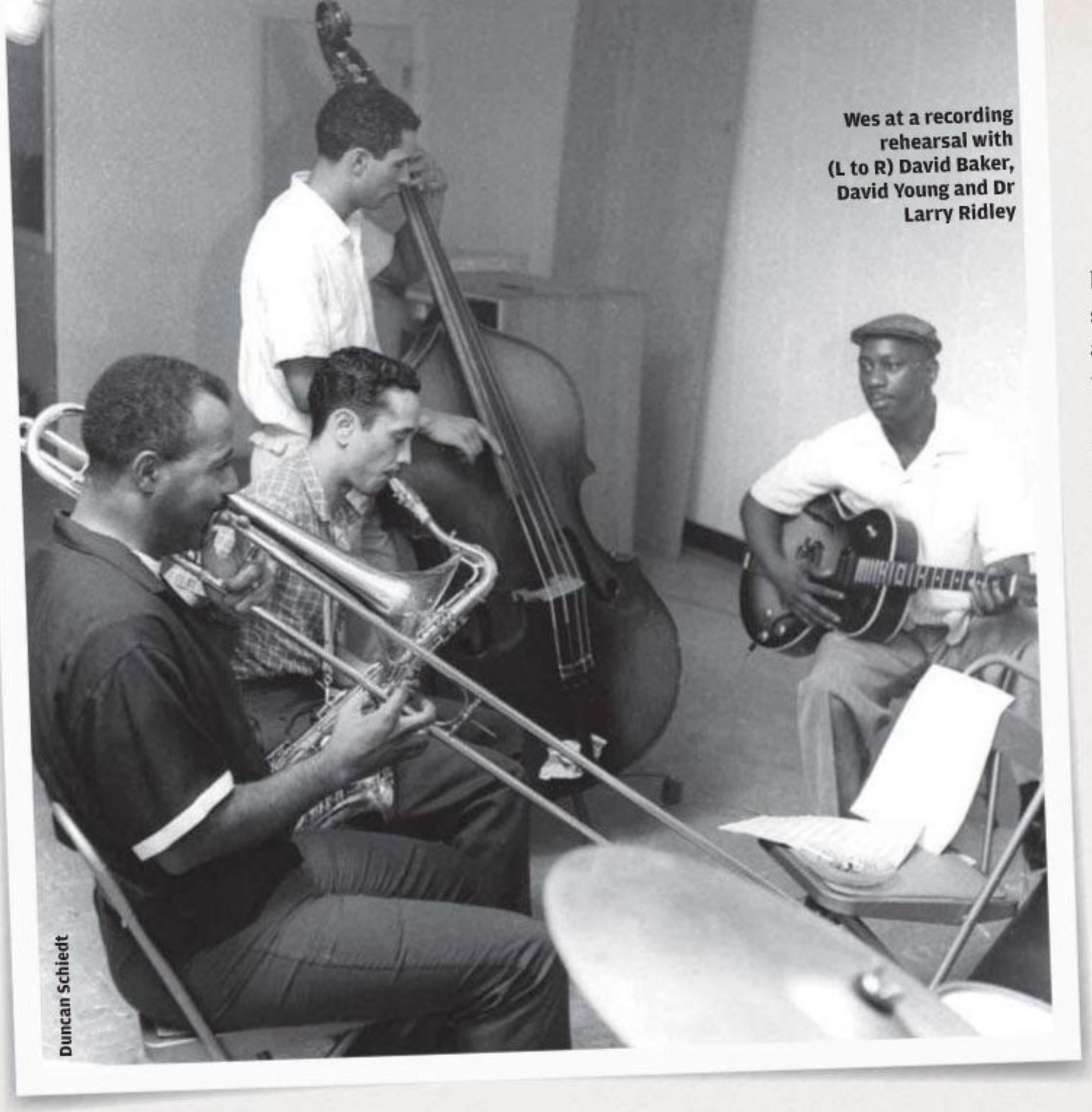


Wes at a recording rehearsal with (L to R) David Baker, David Young and Dr Larry Ridley

Duncan Schiedt

As his popularity grew, Wes's schedule became more and more punishing, and he spent many hours in the studio recording album after album, followed by TV dates and the inevitable promotional tours.

Drummer Jimmy Cobb recalls of his time with Montgomery: "I had just left the [Miles] Davis band in '63 and joined Wes. The very next day, I was in the studio with Wes, recording *Boss Guitar* with the organ player that Wes liked to work with, Melvin Rhyne.

"When we recorded *Smokin' At The Half Note*, some of it was played on the radio – people wanted to listen to Wes. I did one tour with Wes across the States with bass player Ron McClure and pianist Wynton Kelly. Wes never took a plane (except when he came to Europe) – he was afraid of heights. So Wes drove. He liked the 'up-class' car – you know, Cadillacs and all that kind of stuff. We caught a plane.

"I remember one time, we were up in Seattle and were going down to Los Angeles and he was going to drive, and that was kind of a long drive, so I said, 'I'll give up my ticket and drive down with you'. So I kept him company.

"I remember when we were in Seattle, we went up the Space Needle – it was built for the World's Fair. It was about as tall as the Washington Monument, and at the top it had a restaurant. It had an elevator that was glass, so as you were going up you could look out over Seattle. Wes was petrified of that. He stood at the back of the elevator and almost closed his eyes going up there. Wes always took movies wherever he went, so he could show his children where he'd been when he got home. The restaurant revolved, and I remember Wes taking some panoramics out over Seattle to show his kids."

Between '65 and '68, Montgomery got lured by the riches of easy-listening commercialism, recording instrumental versions of popular songs such as *California Dreamin'*, *Goin' Out Of My Head* and *Scarborough Fair*, invariably playing the melody lines with his then-trademark octaves, accompanied by strings and a big band. *Goin' Out Of My Head* became a hit record, but many of Wes's followers were less than enthusiastic about the song, feeling that he'd 'sold out'.

Who would argue, however, that Wes Montgomery wasn't perhaps the most influential jazz guitarist of the modern era? His untimely death from a heart attack on 15 June, 1968 left a legacy that lives on through the likes of George Benson, Pat Metheny and many, many more – and not just in the jazz arena. He will always be remembered as the kindly, humorous, gentle giant of jazz guitar, a generous human being and a devoted family man.

By complete contrast, he's clearly enjoying himself on the side's final track, *After Hours Blues*, where the tone is altogether more sharp and brittle, sounding not unlike his contemporary, T-Bone Walker, in attack mode.

Wes's link to the Gibson L-5 is jazz folklore, but in the early days he could be seen playing a Gibson ES-175 with P-90s. Pat Metheny tells of Wes's first recordings being made using a Gibson L-7 with a single P-90, that he had borrowed from Kenny Burrell. There is also a photograph of Wes with an early Les Paul – he was a great fan and friend of Les.

"By the early 60s, as he started to get a name," says Metheny, "he started to use L-5s with humbuckers."

Initially, these were the models with twin pickups, then in 1963 he ordered an L-5 from the Gibson factory with a single humbucker placed near to the end of the fretboard. The L-5 CES became synonymous with Montgomery, and the Wes Montgomery signature model is stil listed in the 2015 Gibson catalogue.

Throughout his career, Wes played through many different makes and models of amp, but as Metheny says, "he always sounded like himself". In the early to mid-50s, Wes could be seen playing through a Fender Super Reverb with the customary quartet of 10-inch speakers. In the late 50s and early 60s, he fell in love with the 70-watt RMS Standel Super Custom XV amp with its twin channels – one normal and one reverb/vibrato, fitted with a 15-inch JBL speaker.

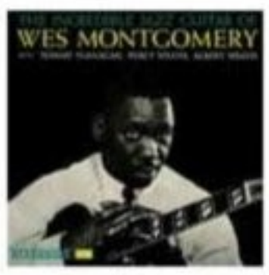
Then, in April 1968, Metheny recalls seeing Wes in Kansas City using a 'pickup' Kustom amp, while fellow guitarist Pat Martino remembers the occasion when he caught Wes at Count Basie's in New York playing through a Fender Bandmaster with a separate 2x12 cab. It should be explained that Wes was not a gearhead. In fact, he once commented that "I don't want nothing special. Then if I drop my box, I can borrow somebody else's." As far as strings were concerned, Wes used heavy gauge 14-58 flat-wound Gibson Hi-Fis.

> "I don't want nothing special. Then if I drop my box, I can borrow somebody else's"
> **WES MONTGOMERY**

LISTEN UP

Wes Montgomery In The Beginning
A double album spanning the years '49-'58. Both discs offer, for the period, surprisingly good live recordings. *Fascinating Rhythm* and *Far Wes* are standouts.

Smokin' At The Half Note
The must-have live album, with the Wynton Kelly Trio. This band swings like no other, and Wes's phrasing is impeccable. A masterpiece.



The Incredible Jazz Guitar Of Wes Montgomery
Seen by many as *the* studio album of his career - look out for the bass/guitar unison on Wes's own composition *Four On Six*.

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PART TWO

DIY WORKSHOP

60s STRAT PICKGUARD PROJECT

In the final part of our guide, **HUW PRICE** shows you how to give your Fender a sixties makeover

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1 Start ageing the pickguard by adding small chops and dents on the underside edge

2 Needle files are ideal for scuffing up the truss-rod scoop. This will look a lot better with some simulated gunk filling up the grooves

3 This original guard has very pronounced router bit chatter marks. The Groovy Guard's edges were much smoother, but you can simulate the look with some patient and careful filing

4 With some 600 grit abrasive paper glued to the underside of a control knob, you are ready to replicate scuff marks

In part one of this project series, I identified all the components and parts needed to put together an early-60s style Stratocaster pickguard assembly. I also discussed how certain parts, such as the metal shield, potentiometers and capacitor value, all have a noticeable effect on tone.

With the theory out of the way, we can finally get around to the fun part. To finish off this project, I'll be investigating various ageing and distressing techniques, before putting everything together and installing the loaded pickguard onto a guitar.

Changing of the guard

Besides the pickups, the celluloid nitrate guard I sourced for this project was the most expensive component. Distressing costly parts can be nervewracking because, more often than not, there's no going back. This is why serious work requires caution, taste and skill. Here's how I did it...

Groovy Guards ship with protective plastic film on the front and back. Since the backs of vintage pickguards tend to be cleaner and lighter than the fronts, I opted to leave the rear film in situ while I worked on the front and sides.

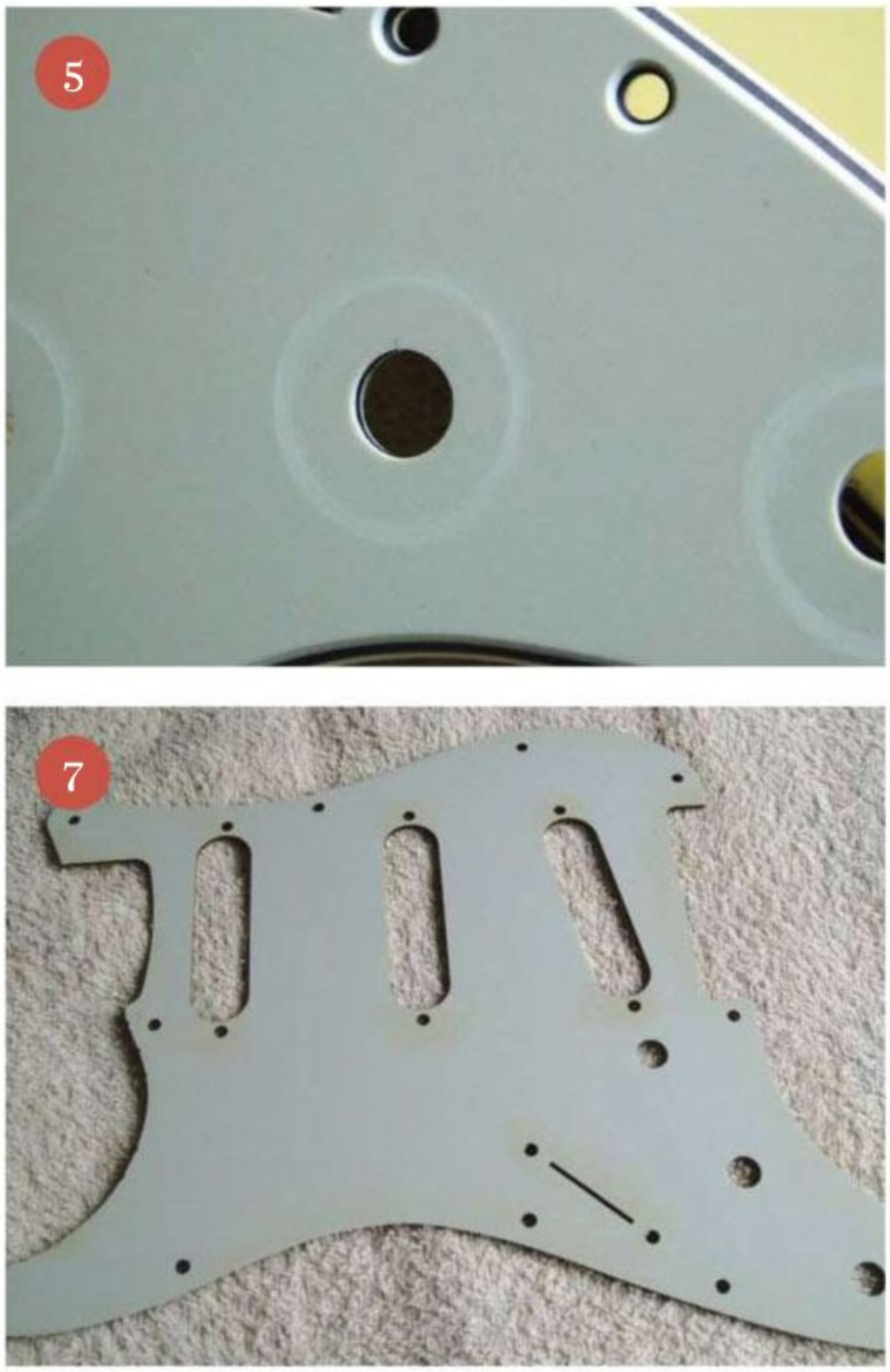
The first task was to replicate the little chips and dents that are usually seen around the bottom edge of old guards. I simply tapped away with a kitchen knife, taking care not to overdo it or to cut too deeply **1**.

Next, I softened the top edges above the pickups and in the treble cutaway, rolling them over using a Stanley knife blade as a scraper, before feathering it in with some 4,000 grade Micro-Mesh.

The truss-rod scoop of Fender pickguards usually looks pretty gnarly and misshapen after 50 years of adjustments, so I used a needle file to score some gouge marks and introduce some irregularity to the shape **2**. The edges of the Groovy Guard looked slightly too smooth, due to a near-total absence of router bit chatter marks, so once again I used a file, working my way all around the guard **3**.

Care should be taken if you try this because celluloid is quite soft, and you should avoid cutting too deep and narrow. Filing the guard produced a fair bit of dust, so I decided to test that it was indeed celluloid. In fact, I could tell from the smell, but when I piled up some dust and held a match to it, the resulting burst of flame eliminated any doubt. I wouldn't recommend trying this yourself.

Replicating the control knob gouges was always going to be tricky, and you often see elliptical or off-centre marks in aged pickguards. I installed a control potentiometer in the volume position, then stuck cut pieces of 600 grade abrasive paper to the underside of a cheap control knob



using Superglue 4. I then pushed it down until it made contact with the guard, and rotated it to create scratch marks on the surface. I repeated the process for the other two controls 5.

At last, it was then time to address the colour issue. In its natural form, the Groovy Guard has a greenish hue with some blue. After masking off the areas under the control knobs, I dissolved a few drops of ColorTone Vintage Amber stain from Stewart MacDonald in some isopropyl alcohol and wiped it onto the guard.

Although I started with a weak mixture, the guard began to take on a darker and greener appearance almost immediately. It was a good start, but the guard needed to be darker and browner to look authentic. So I added a few drops of ColorTone Medium Brown to the mix and persevered.

Although well-used pre-CBS guards tend not to have a uniform colour, you don't want a guard that looks blotchy. I found I could feather the darker areas into lighter areas using 3M Machine Polish. This stage took quite some time and a lot of buffing, but I was pleased with the end result. Once that was done, I had to add some dark brown dirt to all the edges and the screw countersinks.

Past experience had taught me that Morrells naphtha-based Dark Oak Grain Filler is perfect for the job. Its ability to stick to anything and the difficulty of removing the stuff makes it horrible to use for grain filling, but absolutely ideal for simulating the appearance of decades-old crud.

After removing the protective film, I did very little work on the rear of the guard, save for applying a weak Vintage Amber stain around the edges and some slightly darker stain around the switch slot and the areas around the pickup height adjustment screw holes. I didn't want to dull the sheen on the front of the guard, because originals tend to be fairly reflective, but I did give it a thorough going over with a brown shoe brush to add countless randomised and superficial scratches 6 and 7.

Shield plate

It is possible to buy distressed shield plates. Non-distressed ones are a lot cheaper, but the aluminium tends to look very bright and shiny. Unfortunately, aluminium doesn't react to the usual metal ageing techniques – such as the battery and salt water method, or PCB etchant.

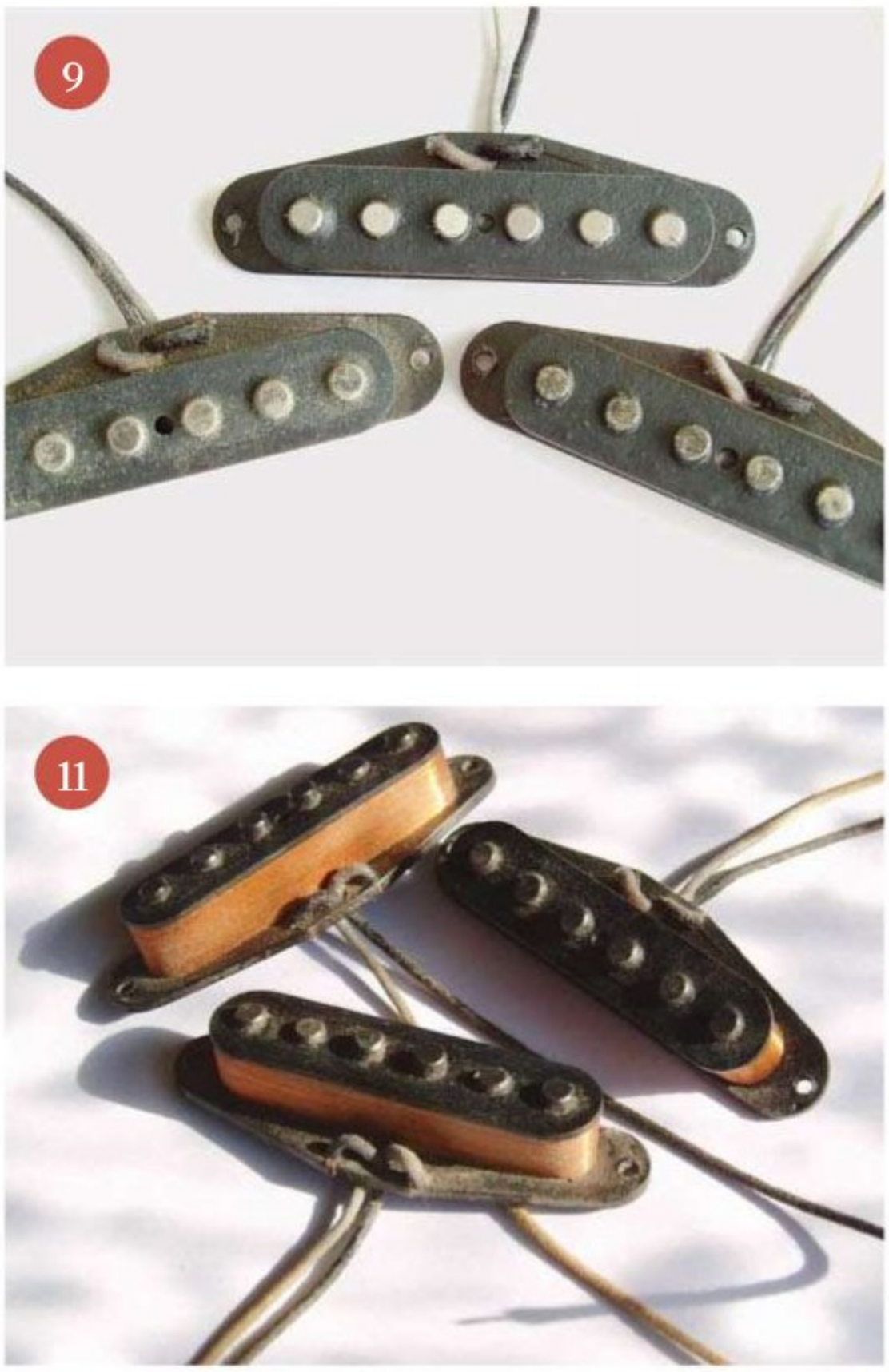
If you want to knock off some of the shiny newness, try running the pickguard through a few dishwasher cycles. After much research, I bought a bag of trisodium phosphate crystals via eBay, added them to some very hot salty water then soaked the shield for a few hours. It may help if >

5 The trick with getting this part to look right is achieving a true circle and making sure it's not off-centre. This area inside the scratches will need to be masked off before you stain the pickguard

6 After much staining and polishing, and the judicious application of grain filler, the front of the guard ended up looking like this

7 Note how the underside is much lighter, with only a hint of stain around the edges and in the areas adjacent to the pickup screws and the switch

8 Compare a brand new aluminium shield to one that has had the dishwasher and trisodium phosphate treatment. Let's just say this ended up more 'in the spirit of' than a convincing repro



9 A brand new, non-distressed pickup can be seen at the top. The pickup on the right has blackened slugs, while the one on the left is nearing the end of the distressing process

10 After ageing the cloth wires, you can see the results next to some untreated wires

11 After all this effort, the pickups ended up looking like this

12 Surgical tubing of the correct type is available from slingshot suppliers, and it's much better value than buying small offcuts from guitar parts specialists. The two pieces on the bottom-right have been stained with ColorTone Vintage Amber to give them more of a vintage appearance

you lightly scuff the shield's surface with ultra-fine wire wool before treating it.

The old shields tend to look grey at the edges, and have a white-ish powdery quality. My efforts certainly took off some of the newness, but I couldn't claim complete success. However, nature may work some magic now that the ageing process has been kickstarted, and I look forward to seeing how the shield will look after a year or so 8.

Distressing pickups and wire

Before attempting this, you should be aware that pickup coils are delicate and easy to damage, so you will need to handle them with great care to avoid snapping the magnet wire. Snapping the wire means the pickup will have to be re-wound, so if you are unsure about doing this it might be best to consider buying a pre-distressed set of pickups from a manufacturer such as Shed, Seymour Duncan or Bare Knuckle. But if you feel confident enough, here's how I did it...

Thanks to the covers, the only parts of the pickup that will ultimately be visible are the tops of the slugs. Opinions may differ, but in my experience old Strat pickups rarely look rusty, and if they are rusty it doesn't bode well; they're more likely to have a dark grey and uneven patina – and you can replicate this by using special metal paint.

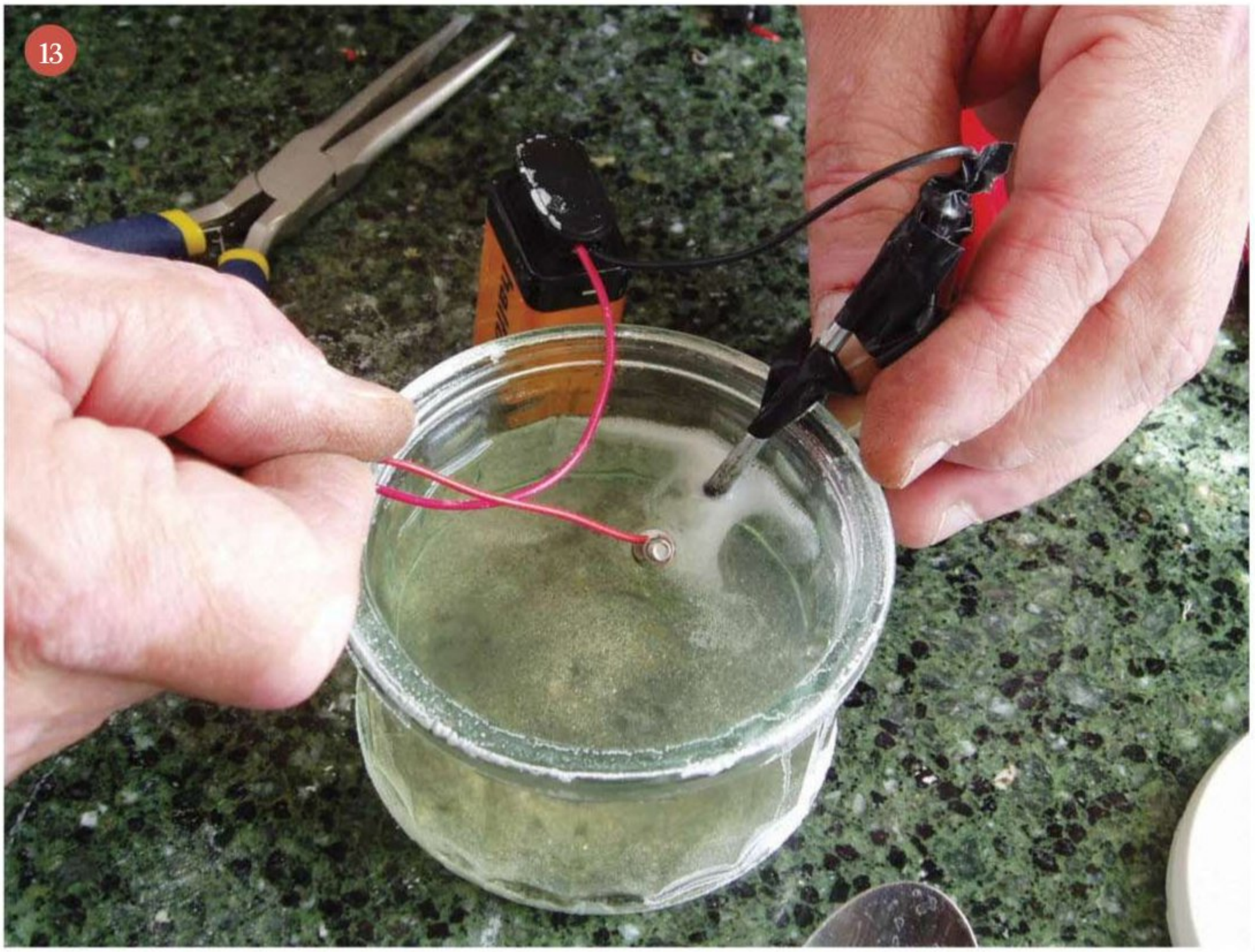
I bought a flat black Birchwood Casey Super Black Instant Touch-up Pen on eBay for just less than £7, and its chisel-shaped tip makes it ideal for this application. The paint dries fairly quickly, so work on one slug at a time.

I applied the paint to the sides first and lightly dabbed off the excess with a cotton bud, then I repeated the process on the top. After a couple of goes, you should get the hang of it; and once all 18 slugs are done set the pickups aside for 10 minutes or so for the paint to dry off. It may look a bit glossy at first, but will appear dull once it has dried 9.

When new, the cloth-coloured wire looks far too bright. I diluted some ColorTone Vintage Amber die in isopropyl alcohol and wiped it onto the black and white leadout wires. Isopropyl alcohol is preferable to water because you don't want the wires inside the cloth covering to oxidise 10.

By this point, the slugs and the cloth were looking a lot better, but the pickups still looked too new. Old pickups tend to be covered in dust, so I co-opted Occam's Razor and concluded that the best way to simulate the look was to cover the Montys in dust.

Unfortunately, fairy dust is hard to obtain and prohibitively expensive, so these were given a dip in the Dyson instead. In all likelihood, any vacuum cleaner bag



should contain ample quantities of suitable material.

Once you pull out the pickups, blow off any excess dust and place the covers over the pickups. Pinch some dust between your fingers and rub it into the black and white wires. Take another pinch, then sprinkle it over the tops of the slugs and use your fingers to force the dust into the gaps between the slugs and holes in the covers. Lastly, deposit a bit more dust over the area where the wires push through the baseplates and you're done 11.

Spacers

Back in the day, Fender used short lengths of surgical tubing as pickup spacers. It must have seemed like a clever solution, because you can place the pickup screws through the pickguard, push the tubing over the screws and, as long as the tubing is tight enough, the screws will hold in place. This makes it considerably easier for a single pair of hands to load the pickups onto a guard. However, if the inside diameter of the tube is too narrow you'll find it hard to push the spacers over the screws, and even harder to tighten them up.

The downside of tubing is that it perishes very quickly – either going rock-hard and losing all elasticity or rotting away to a gooey mess. This probably explains why Fender started using springs instead; but, believe it or not, some people claim they sound different. Stay with us... the theory is that tubing has a dampening effect on pickup microphony, which may or may not be a good thing depending on your playing style and sonic tastes.

Even so, the purpose of this project is to recreate an early 1960s guard, so I made a mental note to test the spring theory some other time and went ahead with the surgical tubing. You can buy short pre-cut lengths from guitar parts suppliers, or buy longer lengths from non-specialists. They usually advertise the tubing for use with slingshots, and you can buy a lifetime's supply for less than the cost of six small offcuts. As Fender's tubing aged, it turned a darker amber colour. Once again, Stew Mac ColorTone dyes can be used to 'age' the spacers 12.

Screws, pots and switches

If you've had your Strat for a while, the pickguard and pickup screws might already look the part, but if they're too bright and shiny it's easy to age chrome-plated parts electronically. Simply hook up a nine-volt battery clip to a nail (or some such) on the negative terminal and a screw on the positive. Fill a small vessel with very salty water, place the nail into the water then dip just the head of the screw into the water. It should bubble and fizz like crazy.

After a few seconds, remove the screw and check its appearance. >

13 **Ageing metal parts electronically is probably the quickest and easiest method for chrome and nickel-plating**

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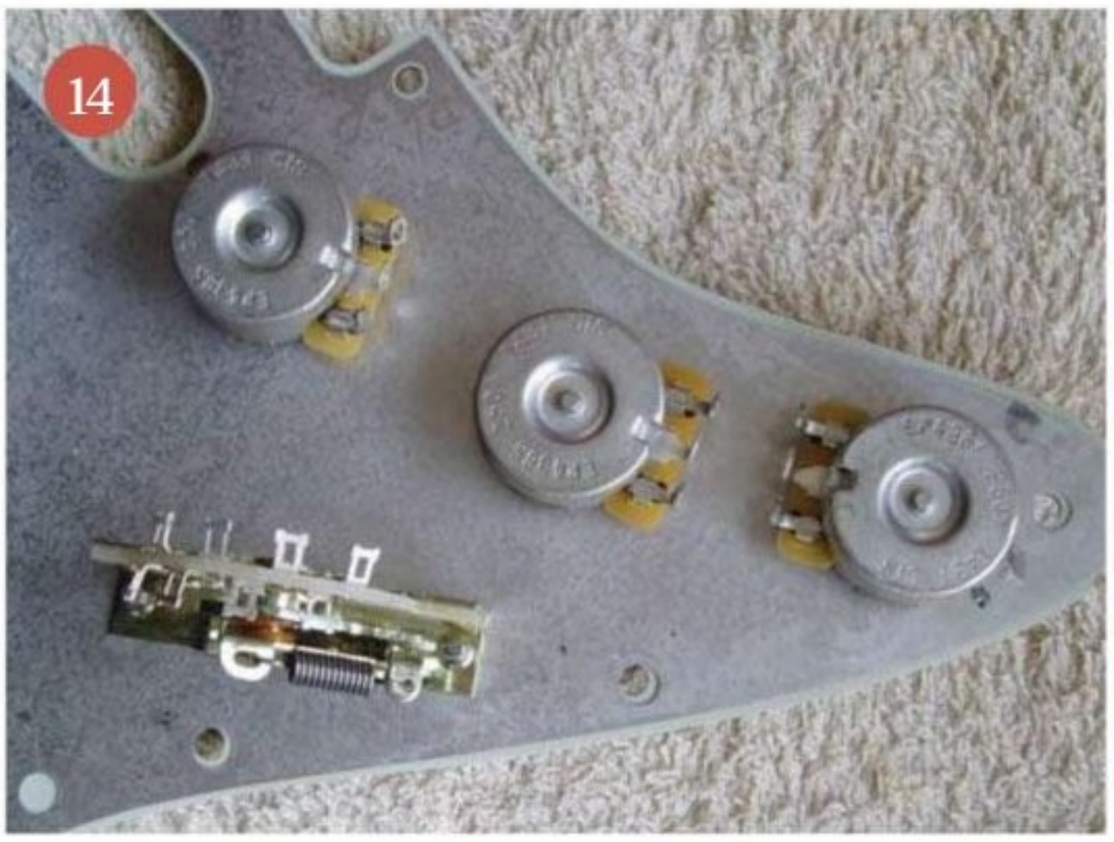
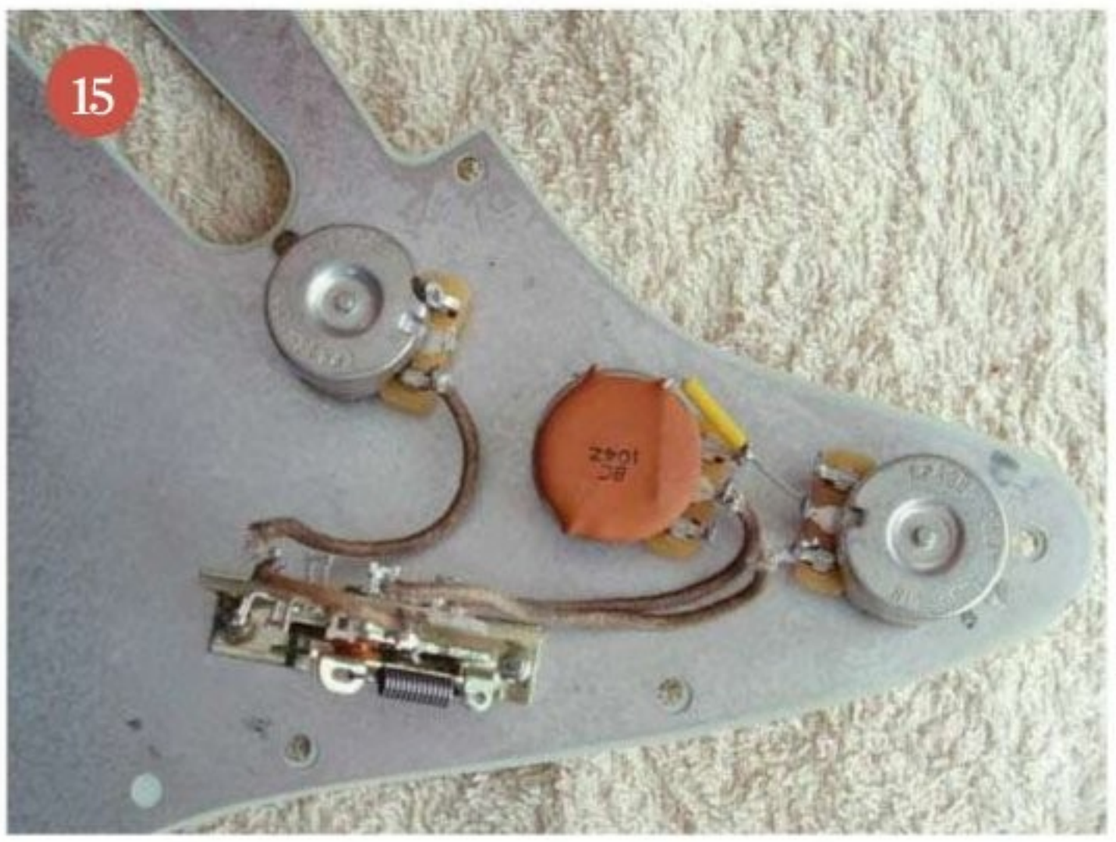




14 to **19** Patience is the key when carrying out the final assembly. Rushing at this stage could cause problems further down the line

This process works quickly, so keep checking and once you're pleased with the look, set the screw aside on a square of kitchen towel to dry off and move on to the next one **13**.

Nickel can be aged in the same way, and the process works even faster. Alternatively, dipping nickel parts in ferric chloride (aka PCB etchant solution) also works well. Make sure the part is clean and completely grease-free before you do this, and wear rubber gloves, otherwise you'll end up etching your fingerprints onto the metal. It takes a matter of seconds, and the part must be washed in water to halt the process.

Immersing potentiometers in salt water or ferric chloride will destroy them. You can probably make pots appear older by removing the covers and treating them with the PCB etchant method, but you have to draw the line somewhere, and distressing pots and switches seems to be an appropriate juncture. At the point at which you are artificially ageing parts that can't be seen when the guitar is assembled, purely for aesthetic reasons, it might be a sign that it's time to climb back out of the rabbit hole.

Annoyingly, five-way Strat switches tend to come with screws that have domed heads, and pickup screws are often the same. For the 60s look, you really need "raised countersunk" (aka Phillips ovalhead) screws for both applications. Even more annoying is the fact that these screws are often made from stainless steel – which strongly resists all the usual ageing methods.

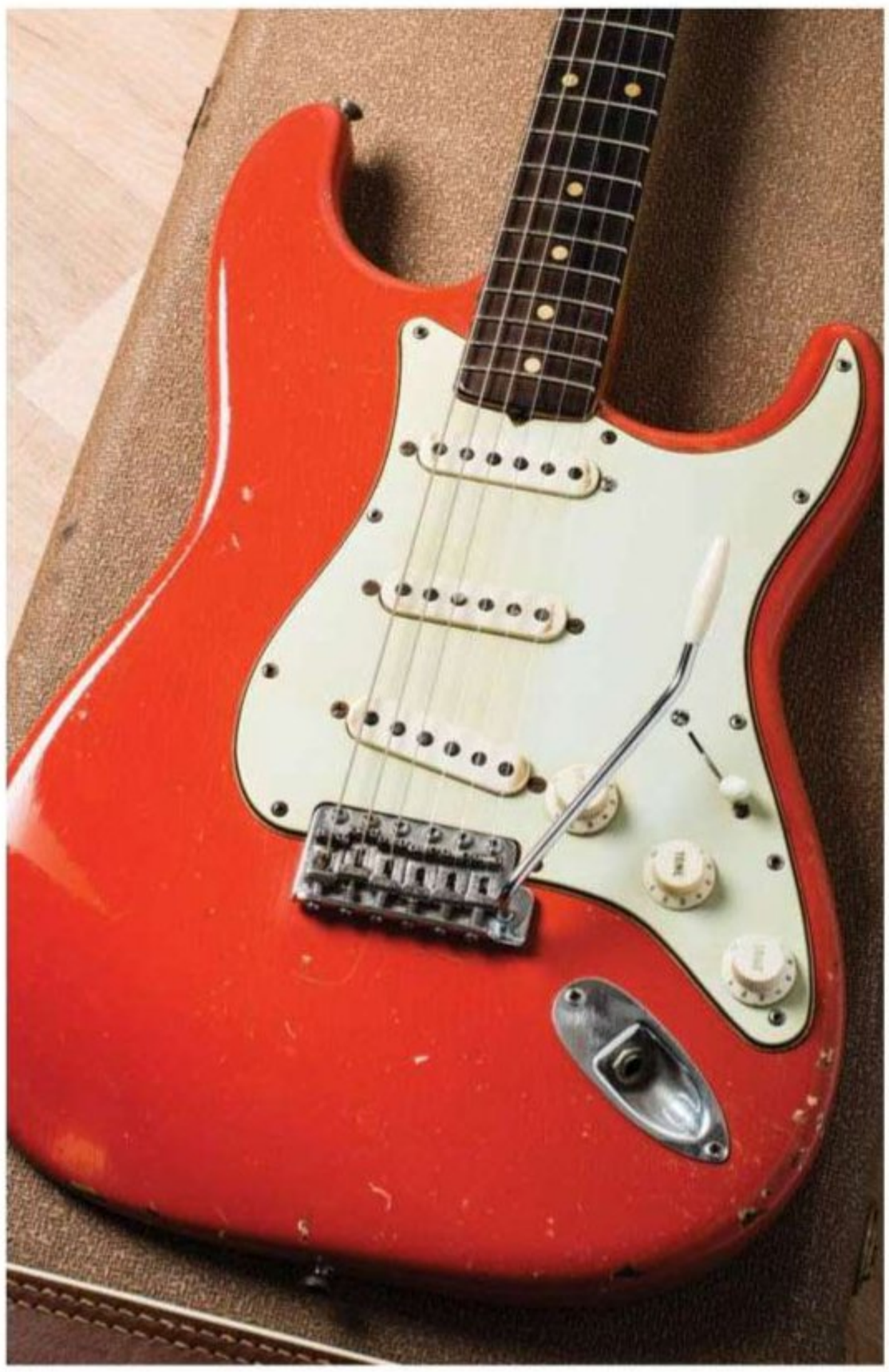
Fortunately, the correct screws are available from various guitar parts outlets and specialist screw suppliers. For pickups, you need 5/8-inch screws with a 6-32 thread. You can use the same for the switch, or use shorter 6-32 thread screws. If possible, buy chrome or nickel if you plan to age them.

Final assembly

Sometimes, it's easier to understand something by seeing it done rather than reading about it. With that in mind, we'll cover the final assembly with a series of pictures and captions that will guide you through the process step by step.

14 Place the shield onto the back of the pickguard and load the three potentiometers and switch. Align the shield with all the screw holes and make sure the switch is able to move freely before tightening everything up.

15 I used a ceramic capacitor that was very slightly oversized. The yellow shielding was stripped from a length of spare cable and slipped over the leg of the capacitor. Once the cap had been soldered into position, I soldered the link wire onto the switch and the three leadout wires to the tone controls and the volume control. Note how the upper lug on the volume pot



is bent over and soldered onto the body of the casing.

16 Push the tubing spacers over the pickup screws to hold them in place. An internal diameter of approximately 3mm is about the right size for the tubing.

17 Mount all three pickups onto the pickguard, pull the hot (cream-coloured) wires off to one side and route all three of the cold (black) wires to the volume control, making a neat right-angled bend under the bridge pickup.

Next, snip the wires so that they extend just over the edge of the potentiometer, push back the cloth to expose the wires, tin them if necessary, then solder them onto the casing. You'll need a very hot iron for this, and I also use a large flat-head screwdriver to hold the wires in position while the solder joint cools.

18 Taking care not to mix up the cables, I soldered each of the pickup's hot wires to the switch. Fender used to route the wires in an elegant curve, so I attempted to replicate that method. You'll need to cut the wires to length to achieve this look.

19 Lastly, the two leadout wires to the output jack were connected to the centre lug and casing of the volume potentiometer. The ground wire from the spring claw was soldered directly to the output jack's sleeve connection in the vintage style.

Verdict

If you think some of this is lunacy, you're probably right. Even so, I had a lot of fun doing it, and learned a thing or two in the process. Whether you want to age your favourite Strat or restore a vintage instrument, now you know how to make it look and sound right, and you can pick and choose which bits to try for yourself. Good luck and please write in to let us know how you get on.

PARTS SUPPLIERS

- **Pickguard** Groovy Guitars
  www.groovy-guitars.com
  N.B. Repro guards are $99 US, not $99 Canadian as stated last month
- **Shield plate**
  Horny's Guitar Parts
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- **Potentiometers & switch**
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NEXT MONTH...

As part of our bumper cover feature on mini pedalboards, we'll not only take a look at some of the best commercially-available 'boards on the market, we'll also show you how to build your own in a step-by-step guide.

To find out how to put together a great homebrew pedalboard, pick up a copy of the September issue of *Guitar & Bass*, on sale 7 August, 2015.

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Friendly Airspace

Most regard the midrange push of a slab of mahogany as fundamental to the timeless magic of great Les Paul tone. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out what happens when you introduce a little air into the equation...

RHYTHM
TREBLE
Gibson

Gibson Memphis ES-Les Paul Black Beauty & Epiphone Les Paul Standard Florentine Pro

IN THE FRAME
Gibson Memphis's ES-Les Paul models feature maple/poplar/maple laminate tops, backs and sides with mahogany centre blocks. The mahogany's mass is concentrated around the stress points at the bridge and neck join, as you can see here

The popular history of the electric guitar suggests that during the golden era of the fifties and early sixties, the factories of Fullerton and Kalamazoo were churning out lightweight, highly resonant tone machines of a quality that would never be equalled. However, by the 1970s, the pillars of American guitar manufacturing had well and truly lost their way; they weren't making them like they used to, the wood was heavy and sub-standard and in some instances, the Japanese imports of the period were better guitars.

But the trouble with received wisdom is it's usually a little black and white, and its advocates almost always fail to dig into the details. Firstly, the notion that all vintage American electrics of the golden era are great instruments simply isn't true; some pre-CBS Strats are pretty damn ordinary, and not all PAF pickups sound astonishing.

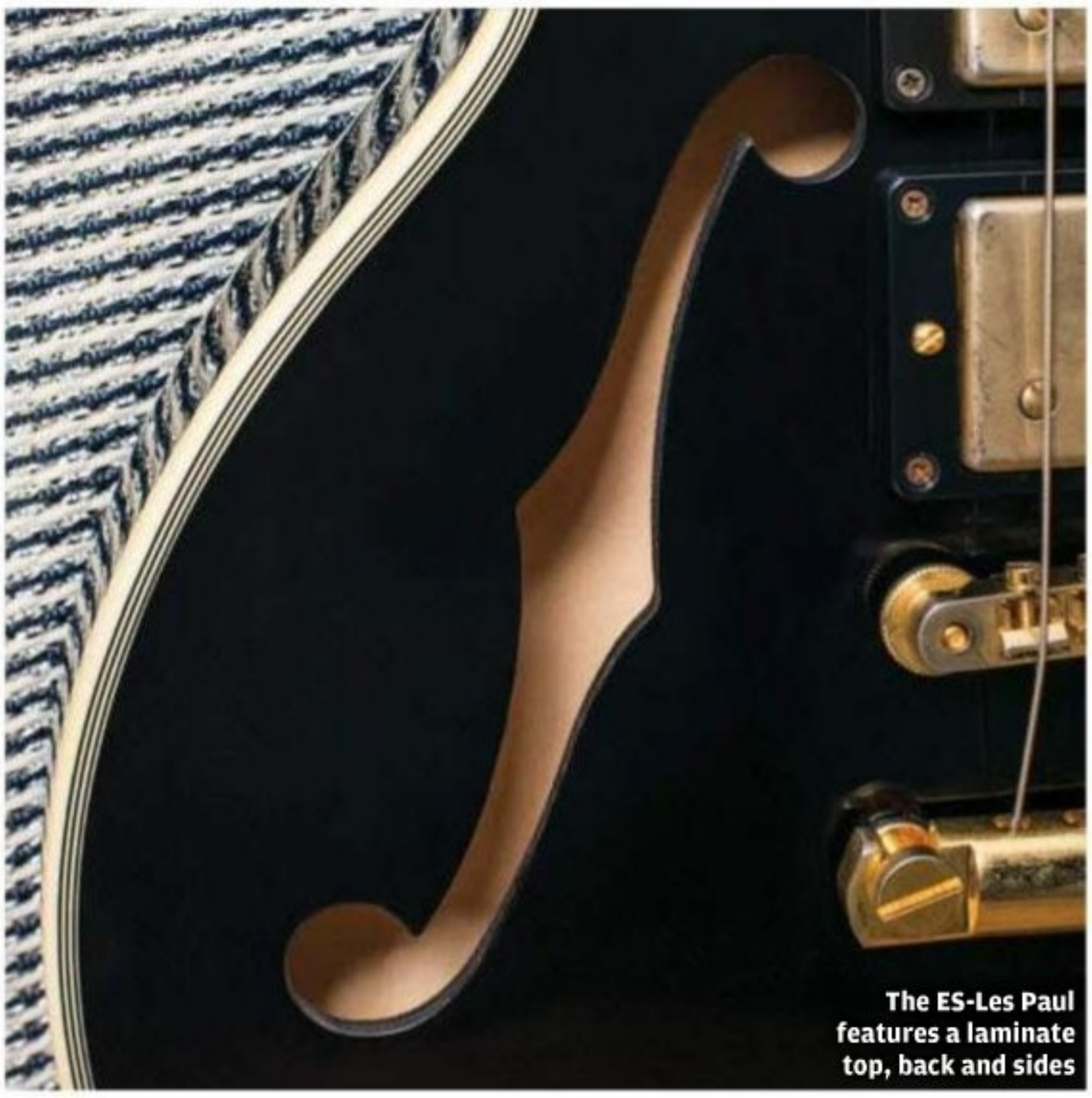
Indeed, many pickup experts we've spoken to over the years concede that, while the finest examples truly are things of awe and wonder, some original PAFs don't sound very good at all. The higher percentage of hand processes involved in early electric guitar manufacture inevitably introduced a greater degree of variance between one instrument off the production line and the next, and those 'Friday afternoon' guitars do exist.

And as far as weight and resonance go, this writer has played a '55 Strat that could have anchored an ocean liner, yet also owned a '73 Tele Custom that weighed less than 7lb and rang like a grand piano.

Not all stereotypes are true then, but it's fair to state that the Gibson Les Paul Standard is on the heavy end of the spectrum when it comes to iconic production solidbodies. It's always been that way, too. Of a sample of 28 1958-60 instruments featured in the Les Paul obsessive's bible *The Beauty Of The 'Burst* by Yasuhiko Iwanade, weights range from 8.1-9.7lbs, with an average of 8.86lbs.

Indeed, the 1959 'Burst formerly owned by Paul Kossoff, that Steve Clarke pores over in microscopic detail

For 2015, Gibson's Memphis factory rang the changes in a measured, player-friendly manner



The ES-Les Paul features a laminate top, back and sides

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The f-hole logo features on non-reissue Memphis models

A trio of MHS humbuckers adorns the Black Beauty

elsewhere in this issue weighs in at a not unsubstantial 8.68lbs.

While many of us have learnt to grin and bear a reasonable amount of weight, few guitarists want to play a 12lb Les Paul, and there has clearly been a consistent demand for a lighter Lester for a number of years now, as Gibson's numerous attempts to provide one seem to corroborate.

Introduced back in 1987, the Les Paul Custom Lite shaved 5/8-inch off the body depth, while recent years have seen various weight-relief methods appearing on USA LPs, ranging from nine rather crude holes routed in the mahogany before the maple cap is attached to full-on tone chambering. Then there was the halfway house of 2012's 'modern weight relief', with its multiple elliptical chambers.

The f-hole truth

The idea of going the whole hog and equipping a Les Paul with f-holes is nothing new either; the bling-y Les Paul Bantam Elite and Bantam Elite Plus (later renamed Florentine Standard and Florentine Plus; metal flake-finished models were re-christened the Elite Diamond Sparkle) were introduced two decades ago by the Nashville Custom Shop. Noel Gallagher's use of a silver Diamond Sparkle model on Oasis' Be Here Now tour was the high point for a range thats sparkle had fizzled out and been duly discontinued by 1998.

Since then, there have also been limited edition Epiphone Les Paul ES models and a variety of compact Epiphone and Gibson ES instruments, such as the ES-339, that tend to possess a little Les Paul in their sonic DNA if not in their appearance.

While both guitars here have precedents in the Gibson and Epiphone catalogues, at present the Florentine Pro is the lone semi-hollow Les Paul in the Epiphone ranks. Gibson's Memphis factory, on the other hand, features a dozen variations on the ES-Les Paul in its 2015 line-up, including a bass – not bad for a model that debuted as recently as last year.

While Gibson USA's Nashville-manufactured 2015 line-up provoked a remarkable furore on internet forums well before instruments even made their way into people's hands, a couple of hundred miles south west along the I-40 down in Memphis, under the auspices of Mike Voltz, a quieter evolution continues to produce some of the most inspiring and evocative production-line semi-acoustic guitars in the world.

The 2015 model year saw Gibson Memphis ring the changes in a measured, player-friendly manner. As a result, the ES-Les Paul Black Beauty features a thickened transition between the neck and headstock for greater strength and stability, a bone nut to aid both tone and tuning, rolled neck binding for a more played-in feel straight out of the box, Orange Drop capacitors with less treble cut, old-style Grover Milk Bottle Rotomatic tuners, a Historic-spec truss rod and an f-hole engraved truss-rod cover – the latter now featuring on all non-Historic Gibson Memphis models.

The eagle-eyed among you will also notice that the medium jumbo fretwire on ES-Les Pauls now extends over the binding for a little more fretboard real estate on the outside of the first and sixth strings.

Age concern

Gibson's VOS finish treatment is considerably less divisive than the kind of throw-it-down-the-stairs 'ageing' that gets at least half of the guitar buying public rather het up while the other half are reaching for their credit cards. Our Black Beauty certainly looks the part, though on very close inspection the top does appear more like the effect of half an hour spent rubbing away with some steel wool rather than decades of gigging. That said, it'll soon settle down with some playing time.

Where the Gibson ES-Les Paul employs a maple/poplar/maple laminate frame in traditional ES-335 style, then adds a mahogany centre block with most of its mass concentrated under the stress points of the bridge and neck join (see sidebar), the Epiphone Florentine is more of a hollowed-out Les Paul Standard with a chambered mahogany back glued to a maple cap with a pretty AAA flame veneer.

In practice, the two contrasting approaches have produced instruments of broadly similar weights, though >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson Memphis ES-Les Paul Black Beauty

Gretsch was doing the chambered, compact single-cut thing back in the 1950s, and the **G6128T-TVP Power Jet £2,249** is a vintage-inspired model voiced to rock, with TV Jones Power'Tron pickups. For a compact ES experience with a hint of Les Paul in its accent, audition the **Gibson Memphis ES-339 Satin £1,699**; with a little T-Cut and elbow grease it'll soon take on the VOS look.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Les Paul Standard Florentine Pro

Like the Gibson equivalent, **Epiphone's compact ES-339 Pro £399** squeezes plenty of ES flavour and a twist of Les Paul into a more compact package. Gretsch's hardtail **G5435 Electromatic Pro Jet £380** features a chambered basswood body and bags of retro growl and jangle, thanks to a pair of Black Top Filter'Tron pickups.

the Epiphone's poly finish has that 'dipped in glass', heavy-gloss appearance and feel that's far removed from vintage spec.

Ironically, though, it's the softer corners of Epiphone's new ProBucker pickup covers that are the closest to vintage PAFs in shape; while the Memphis Historic Spec units are unpotted with mismatched coil windings, and thus closer to being period correct on the inside, for the time being, Gibson Memphis is persevering with the sharper corners and more rounded edges that characterise most generic modern humbucker covers.

We wonder how long it will take before the 'right' PAF pickup covers come trickling down from the new £5,000 and upwards Gibson Custom True Historic range to the Memphis line. On a three-pickup Les Paul, it would really make a visual difference, but enough about looks; how do these instruments sound and feel?

In use

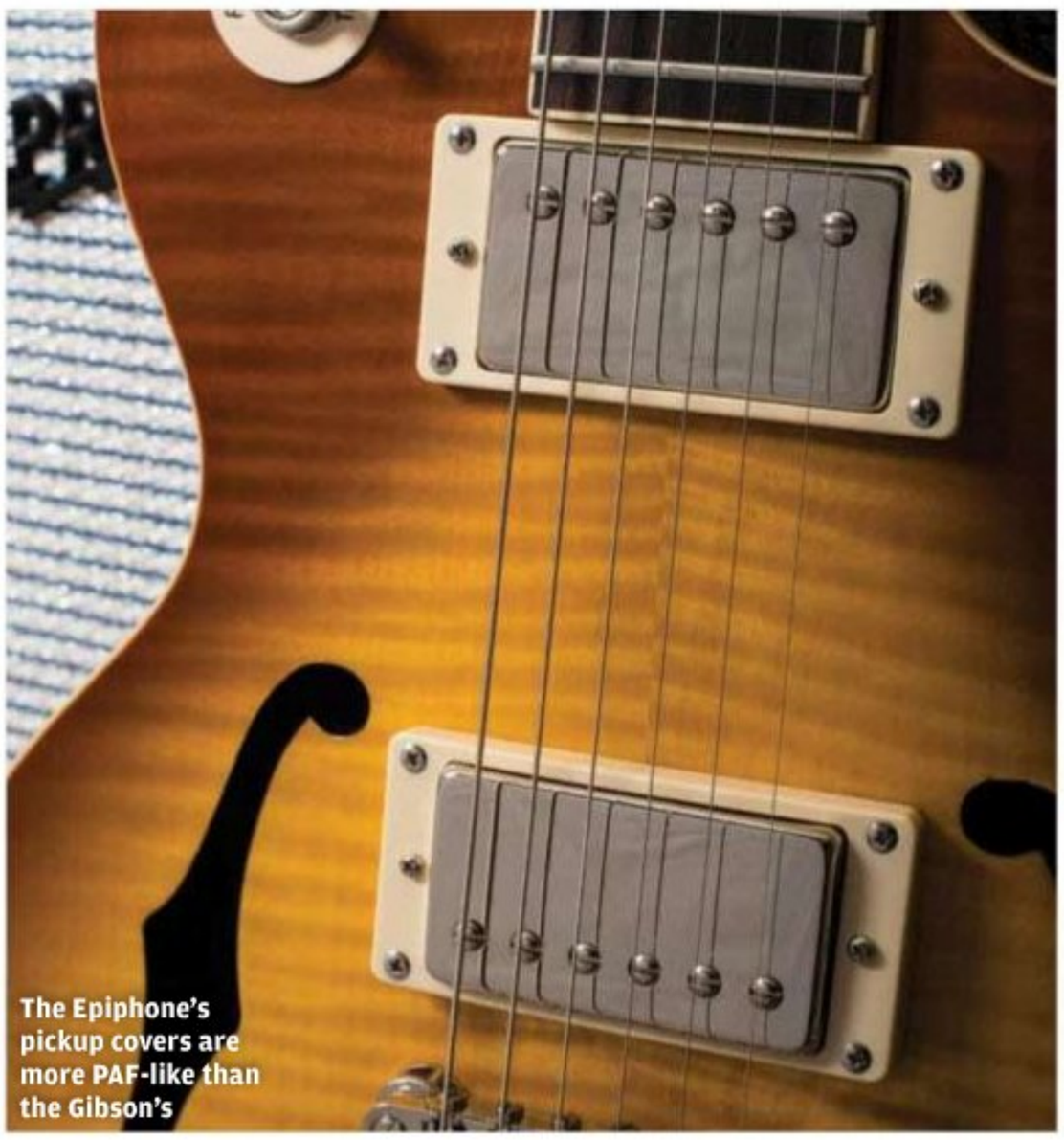
The Epiphone's Slim Taper 1960s D profile gives away only 3mm in 12th-fret depth to the Gibson, but the Black Beauty's C shape feels much more rounded and substantial and this, in combination with the nitrocellulose finish, makes for an instrument with a much more vintage-like personality in comparison to the Epiphone's more generic feel. Given the price differential, you'd expect as much, but that's not to say the Florentine is a bad guitar; far from it. The Epiphone is a comfortable, speedy player that will appeal to the majority of guitarists.

Compared to our reference Gibson ES-335 with Mojo Pickups PAF replicas installed, where the larger-bodied instrument is creamier - and indeed Creamier - sounding, the ES-Les Paul is more Page than Clapton, with more of a snarl in the highs and upper-mids. Compared directly to a solidbody Les Paul Standard, somewhat predictably, there's less midrange thump and authority in low-register chords from the Black Beauty.

However, there's a wonderfully vocal, expressive voice for blues soloing in any of the pickup positions, while the middle position is of course given a little more push than you'd get out of a twin-pickup Les Paul, because of the mandatory combination of Alnico II bridge and Alnico III middle pickups.

Though the Les Paul Custom has often been a popular choice for players who use loads of gain, in this incarnation we'd recommend exercising a little more restraint - the pickups do squeal a bit with combinations of high volume, gainy drive and proximity to

Pull the Florentine's volume controls for coil-split tones



The Epiphone's pickup covers are more PAF-like than the Gibson's

The Epiphone's double vacuum wax-potted pickups are considerably more resistant to unwanted feedback

the amplifier, with the neck unit the most prone to microphony. It's suited better to expressive blues and classic rock than it is to heavy metal.

With sensible levels of drive, the middle setting is lots of fun, and we probably spent more time playing with the switch in this position than we ever would with either a regular ES-335 or Les Paul. For grungy powerchord riffs and rhythms, it's thick and gnarly without turning into mush, while higher-register lead playing has a hint of cocked wah tonality – we reckon it would make a great main voice for a guitarist in a riffy, alt-rock trio, where that extra thickness can really fill out the sound in the way the bridge pickup alone isn't able to.

Both guitars look fantastic when strapped on, but – perhaps inevitably – stripped of the dense mahogany that makes a regular Les Paul so body-heavy, there's some neck dive in both instances, so you'll need to be judicious in your choice of strap.

In a straight A/B, as you might perhaps expect, the Epiphone's additional mahogany translates into greater warmth, but the overall sounds are less sophisticated, and as ever the differences between the two instruments get more apparent as you wind up towards gig volume. The more affordable guitar sounds fine in isolation, and it's perhaps somewhat unfair to expect it to compete sonically with a considerably more expensive instrument that will always have more of that certain something when it comes down to character and voice.

All that said, though, the Epiphone's double vacuum wax-potted pickups are considerably more resistant to unwanted feedback and can cope with much higher levels of gain. In addition, though engaging the coil-splits brings a significant drop in level, there's a sweet, light funkiness to the neck and middle settings, and some almost sixties, Kinks-like brattishness to the bridge when used in split-coil mode with EL84s in overdrive.

Top hat knobs aren't the easiest to pull up with sweaty mitts in a gig environment – speed knobs would have probably been a more practical selection. Having said that, it's to the Epiphone Florentine's great credit that it isn't in any way embarrassed in the company of Gibson's Memphis Black Beauty.

KEY FEATURES

Gibson Memphis ES-Les Paul Black Beauty

PRICE £2,899 (including hardcase)
DESCRIPTION Single-cutaway semi-hollow electric guitar, made in USA
BUILD Maple/poplar/maple laminate body with mahogany centre block, rounded C-profile mahogany glued-in neck, 304mm/12" radius Richlite fingerboard with mother of pearl block inlays, bone nut and 22 medium jumbo frets
HARDWARE Gold-plated TonePros AVR-2 bridge and lightweight stopbar tailpiece, Grover Milk Bottle Rotomatic machineheads
ELECTRICS 3x MHS humbucking pickups, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, 2x volume, 2x tone
SCALE LENGTH 628mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.0lbs/3.1kg
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Ebony VOS lacquer only
CONTACT Gibson
www.gibson.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Drop-dead cool looks
+ Wonderful classic blues-rock tones from the MHS 'buckers
– VOS treatment not the most subtle or convincing we've seen
– Neck dive
– Unpotted pickups limit versatility

With sensible levels of gain there are killer tones on tap from this gorgeous guitar. Just be sure it's for you before shelling out

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Epiphone Les Paul Standard Florentine Pro

PRICE £459 (including hardcase)
DESCRIPTION Single-cutaway semi-hollow electric, made in Indonesia
BUILD Chambered mahogany body with maple top and AAA-grade flame maple veneer, 1960s SlimTaper D-profile mahogany glued-in neck, 304mm/12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid trapezoid inlays, synthetic nut and 22 medium jumbo frets
HARDWARE Nickel LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece, Epiphone Deluxe vintage-style machineheads
ELECTRICS Epiphone ProBucker-3 (bridge) and ProBucker-2 (neck) humbucking pickups, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, 2x volume with pull/push coil splits, 2x tone
SCALE LENGTH 628mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 6.8lbs/3.0kg
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Honey Burst (as reviewed), Iced Tea, Faded Cherry Burst, Trans Black, Vintage Sunburst, Wine Red
CONTACT Epiphone
www.epiphone.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great value for money
+ Interesting array of coil-split and humbucking sounds
– Neck dive
– Sound and feel a little generic compared to the 'real thing'

If you fancy a Les Paul but don't want to break either your back or the bank, this is worth an audition. It handles high gain and high volume situations well, too

8/10

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Fender Dave Murray Stratocaster

A new signature model for the Iron Maiden guitarist, with a high-end spec at an affordable price. **SIMON BRADLEY** checks it out...

Since their kinetic 1980 debut, Iron Maiden have been at the forefront of UK metal throughout a career spanning 15 albums. The fierce loyalty demonstrated by their fans has rarely wavered, and today they're arguably bigger than ever.

The band's three-guitar line-up still sees Dave Murray riffing away stage right, as he has done since 1978. His unmistakable solos, coloured with the somewhat unconventional use of the neck pickup, are as much a part of the Maiden sound as the galloping bass of Steve Harris and Bruce Dickinson's air raid siren vocals.

During the band's heady rise to the top, Murray was inseparable from a black, maple 'board Strat that he'd bought in 1976 – one once owned by Free guitarist Paul Kossoff, whose iconic 1959 Les Paul Standard we look at in depth on p12 of this issue.

Retrofitted with a pair of DiMarzio Super Distortion humbuckers, that Strat featured on the first eight Maiden albums and associated tours. In 2009, it was recreated by Fender, appearing in the catalogue as the US-made Artist Series Dave Murray Signature Strat.

Needless to say, it proved popular, albeit with a pretty specific slice of the guitar-buying public, and it went some way to slaking the thirst left somewhat unquenched by Fender's 2001 be-mirrored Iron Maiden Strat and tantalising glimpses of the Japan-only HST-57DM Murray Tribute model.

This new DM Signature is based on the Stratocaster Murray now calls his number one, following the retirement of his black original, and has been released under the California Series banner. This, of course, equates to Mexican construction, and the associated modest price tag will surely increase this instrument's appeal straight out of the box.

The neck's modern, flat yet shallow C-shape isn't super-skinny, but it should appeal to most rock players

Up until quite recently, Murray's own guitar featured a trio of Seymour Duncan Hot Rails single coil-sized humbuckers. However, he has since swapped the central pickup for a JB Jr, a change in preference that's reflected on this new guitar.

Dave talks specifically about the reasoning behind this change on p57 of this issue and, as we'll discover, it does add more variety to the guitar's tonal palette. The instrument also features a five-way blade selector, rather than the three-way fitted on the 2009 version, and the trio of 250k pots operates in the customary manner.

Currently, the guitar is available only in Two-Colour Sunburst, and the grain of the alder body shows through the gloss polyester finish very nicely. The classy vibe is enhanced by a pearloid scratchplate, and we admire the decision to site Murray's signature on the rear of the headstock: the grinning Eddie face on the front of the 2001 >

The Floyd Rose vibrato rests on the body, providing downward travel only

KEY FEATURES

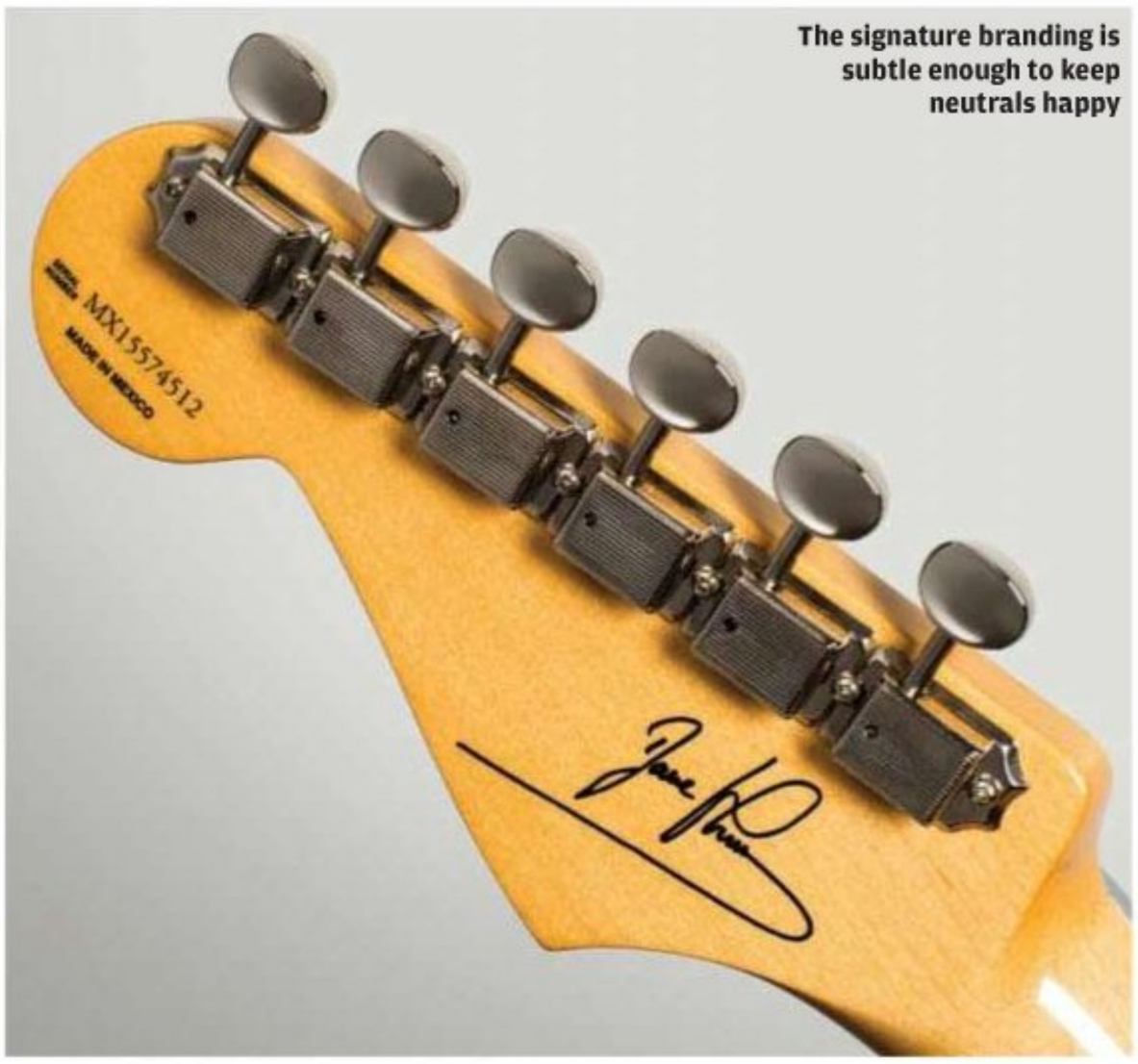
Fender Dave Murray Stratocaster

- **PRICE** £749 (inc Fender gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody signature six-string guitar. Manufactured in Mexico
- **BUILD** Alder body with gloss polyester finish; maple neck with C-profile, gloss urethane finish and 241mm-355.6mm (9.5-14-inch) compound radius rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Floyd Rose Original double locking vibrato with R3 locking nut; vintage-style Fender tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Seymour Duncan SHR-1 Hot Rails humbuckers (bridge and neck), plus SJBJ-1 JB Jr humbucker (middle), five-way blade selector, volume and two tone pots
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.2mm at nut, 52.4mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.9kgs/8.6lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Two-colour Sunburst only
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

FENDER DAVE MURRAY STRATOCASTER £749

ELECTRIC GUITAR

Murray prefers the JB Jr in the middle position for cleans



The signature branding is subtle enough to keep neutrals happy

Vintage-style tuners and a locking nut grace the headstock

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Jackson's **Adrian Smith Signature SDX £415** features an HSS configuration of Jackson pickups, plus a Floyd Rose whammy. **Andy Timmons' Ibanez AT10P £899** offers a gorgeous neck and a versatile selection of DiMarzio electrics. High-end incarnations of both are also available

model's headstock was something of an anathema.

The 2009 model's maple neck offered a softened V-profile, as would be expected from a late-50s guitar. Here, though, the neck is totally different in feel and – to us at least – is the better for it, considering the hard rockin' uses to which the guitar is likely to be put. It has a modern, flat yet shallow C-shape that, although not quite into super-skinny Ibanez territory, should appeal to most rock players. It's eminently playable and the urethane top coat has been applied expertly to give a mirror-smooth finish.

The rosewood board bristles with 21 medium jumbo frets and offers a 241mm-355.6mm compound radius, which in turn allows for an extremely low action: a micro-tilt, also part of the original California Series' specs, is included here. Additional hardware includes a Floyd Rose Original locking vibrato bridge, which is set resting on the body, providing only downward movement, plus the associated R3 locking nut and vintage-style tuners.

It's a well-made guitar, plays well out of the box and looks great: what's more, it's not an obvious signature model at first glance – something that may well have its own allure.

Murray-style solos with the neck pickup are totally convincing, with just the right ratio of throaty warmth to cut

In use

With a DC resistance of 16.9k, the bridge Hot Rails is certainly a high-output pickup, and we were initially a little concerned that the tone might be overly toppy and thin, especially with a Floyd Rose bridge. Not a bit of it. The old trick of setting the Floyd flat to the body works for Eddie Van Halen, and it certainly does the honours in this case. Yes, a good hard-rock tone is full of high-end harmonics and cutting gain, but there's plenty of depth, too. Maiden riffs are complex and often feature interesting progressions and inversions, so there's no place for indistinct guitar mush. Happily, the DM provides an impressive level of string separation – even at the highest gain levels.

Classic Murray-style solos with the neck pickup are totally convincing, with just the right ratio of throaty warmth to

cut, and lowering the volume cleans the tone up without losing any depth.

With its slightly lower output, the central JB Jnr is arguably the best of the three solo'd pickups for clean options, but we found we preferred position two in this regard, as it combines the bridge and middle pickups; there's a hint of Stratty twang mixed with a middly character that works very nicely indeed.

The guitar isn't suited only to metal, of course, but such is the kick from the two Hot Rails that you may find it a challenge to achieve a tone just at the point of break-up that's suitably subtle for, say, Texas blues: there's always that ceramic edge close by.

As we've already discussed, the neck is an absolute revelation and a joy to play. We didn't experience any tuning issues with the Floyd and, once your strings have been stretched in, we can't imagine that you will either.

We genuinely like this guitar. It's refreshingly removed from the central pillars of the established Fender mantra but not to the extent that it strays too far away from the herd. The Dave Murray Signature is an instrument upon which hard-rock and metal styles will be performed easily and, at £749 (including a padded gigbag), it represents truly excellent value for money.

The trio of hot pickups it comes armed with won't be for everyone, and those hoping for the usual gamut of traditional Strat tones should probably look elsewhere, but the guitar is more versatile than you may have initially assumed.

It's nigh-on perfect for metal and hard and classic rock but it possesses an appealingly neutral aesthetic; if you don't fancy the stigma that comes with wielding, for example, a Dean Dimebag or Jackson King V, the Dave Murray Strat could be just what you've been looking for.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

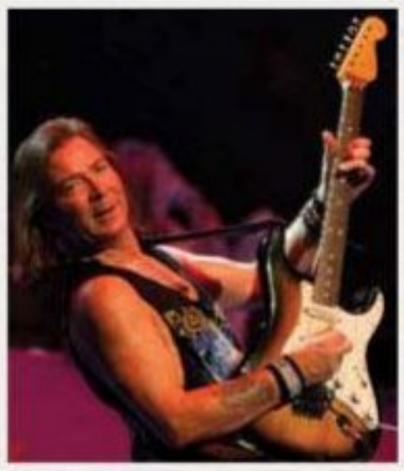
+ Excellent price
+ Lovely neck
+ Authentic rock tones
+ No stability issues

– Only one finish option
– Pickups may be too hot for some
– It's not a traditional Strat

Ideal for hard rock, metal and so much more, this is an instrument worth checking out for the gorgeous neck alone. It's Murray's mint.

8/10

Too good to hurry...



Whether they like it or not, just about every player of any stature has one guitar with which they're most strongly associated. For Dave Murray, it's the Fender Strat, specifically the black model with a maple neck he bought in 1976 – a guitar that had a bit of history.

"It used to belong to Paul Kossoff of Free," Murray told Blabbermouth.net in 2008. "I saw it advertised in *Melody Maker*, and I went down and checked it out. I got the serial numbers to make sure that it was his guitar. I paid about $1,400 for it, which in 1976 was quite a bit of money, but I didn't care. I just sold everything I had so I could get it."

During Maiden's early-80s golden period, Murray was occasionally seen on stage with a Dean Z or Ibanez Destroyer, but always gravitated back to his Strat: even the ESPs and Jacksons he flirted with during the late 80s/early 90s wore their Fender influence heartily on their sleeves.

For the past decade or so, his number one axe has been the two-tone Sunburst Strat upon which the new signature model has been based. Rare dalliances with a Gibson Les Paul or Epiphone Les Paul Ultra aside, it's still the guitar he reaches for. We spoke to Dave about the origins of the new guitar, and how it was put together.

When did you begin working on a signature model? What R&D was done?

"Fender approached us in 2011 about issuing a signature model based on my main tobacco Stratocaster, and we agreed straight away that it would be a fantastic idea. The guys came out to measure up the original guitar while we were touring the USA, and my tech Colin Price worked with the design team over at Fender to make sure that it was as close to my guitar as possible. We also wanted it to be affordable,

"The Seymour Duncan pickups, electrics and Floyd Rose hardware are identical to my Strat"

so we opted to manufacture in Mexico. The Seymour Duncan pickups, electrics and Floyd Rose hardware are identical to my Strat, so it's been very rewarding to keep the cost affordable for most players, but not to compromise on quality."

How close is it in feel to your main stage Strat?

"With the fact that my main Strat has been played at every show over the last 15-20 years, it's become almost effortless, but when Fender sent over the first prototype in 2012, it felt perfect. My tech had placed it in the guitar rack next to my other stage guitars, and I picked up the prototype instead of the original during the show, as they looked and felt so similar. I ended up using it on a couple of songs that night!"

Why is the Floyd Rose set with no upward travel?

"The original guitar is a California Series Stratocaster, which we had modified with the Floyd Rose. I like the stability of the locking system, but having the bridge set against the body gives more resonance. I suppose it's a similar feel to the vintage Strat bridge, having more contact with the body."

When did you retire your original black Strat, and why?

"I think we retired the old black Strat back in 1988, as I started playing ESP during the *Seventh Son...* tour, before coming back to Fender, and yes I still have it."

Tell us something about the Fenders you use on stage

"We have three Stratocasters in total, that have all the same design as the main tobacco Strat, one in cream and another in black, except those two guitars both have maple necks. The original specs for the Strats had three Seymour Duncan Hot Rail pickups, and we kept that setup for years. The only change, which we've made recently, was to add a Seymour Duncan JB Jnr in the middle position, as it has lower output compared to the Hot Rails, which handles the clean sounds much better."

What do you need from a guitar you use on stage?

"Stability, comfort and to look cool!"

Duesenberg Caribou

Duesenberg's most individual guitar design is back, with new colours, new pickups and a revised control layout. **HUW PRICE** does the Caribou test

KEY FEATURES

Duesenberg Caribou

- **DESCRIPTION** Offset chambered solidbody electric, manufactured in Germany
- **PRICE** £1,339 (doesn't include case)
- **BUILD** American alder body, one-piece maple set neck with D profile, 12" radius bound rosewood fingerboard with pearloid dot inlays and 22 medium jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Duesenberg Deluxe Tremola, Duesenberg steel saddle bridge, locking Duesenberg Z-Tuners, "Art Diego" buttons
- **ELECTRICS** Duesenberg Grand Vintage Humbucker, Duesenberg Domino P-90, master volume, master tone and three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 650 mm/25.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.55 kg/7.8lb
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Norvik Blue, Black (as reviewed)
- **CONTACT** Brilliant Distribution 01908 375411 **www.duesenberg.de**

I was smitten by the Duesenberg Caribou when I first reviewed it a couple of years ago, but felt it was a flawed masterpiece. Despite being one of the most drool-worthy designs I'd seen in eons, there was a sense that the designers had tried too hard. Three pickups seemed one too many, and the control layout was overly complex. I was also disappointed to get a model with a wrapover bridge rather than the Duesenberg Deluxe Tremola vibrato.

The new version is simplified, with Duesenberg's regular arrangement of a three-way selector switch with master volume and tone. It also has a tried and tested pickup combination, with a bridge humbucker and a P-90 in the neck. The one-piece maple neck is set into the chambered alder body, with a dual-action truss rod under a rosewood fingerboard. The 'board is bound to match the body, and the front edge of the peghead is left natural.

The quality of the build, hardware and finish is top-drawer, with playability to match. All Duesenberg guitars pass through the factory's computer-controlled Plek machine, which levels, crowns and polishes the frets to engineering tolerances. Consequently, the action is slick, slinky and buzz-free.

In use

Die-cast tuners, combined with a chambered body guarantees neck dive. It's not as bad as a Firebird, but it's odd that lightweight vintage-style tuners aren't fitted, since Duesenberg and Kluson (Europe) share common ownership. Nevertheless, the Caribou is lightweight with a slim D-profile neck and a fantastic vibrato, with a responsive feel and stable tuning.

The humbucker combines greasy grind with clarity. The latter is aided by a degree of microphony that many prefer, but it can cause squeal with high gain. In contrast, the more balanced frequency response of the P-90, and its lower output, make for a sweeter, clearer tone. The positioning balances out the two pickups, and when they're combined, the midrange hollows out for a phasey shimmer with a hint of quack. It's an inspiring tone that's achieved by auto-disengaging the humbucker's outer coil with both pickups selected.

Duesenberg went out on a limb with the Caribou Mk1, and I particularly liked the hybrid Strat/Dynasonic tone of the pickups. Perhaps it has erred on the side of caution this time, but it looks just as good. The new pickups may have broader appeal, but some may find them uninspiring – middle position notwithstanding. They cover the basics that you'd expect from vintage-wound PAFs and P-90s, but without distinction.

Since the unplugged tone is stellar, I couldn't help fantasising about dropping in a pair of Filter'Trons. Sadly, Cyan Green is no longer a finish option, but it's still a surfy, indie, alt-rock, rockabilly and rootsy dream guitar. With a set of truly top-notch pickups, the Caribou would hold its own against Kolls, Fanos and the like; and even with the case, it would be about half the price. Resist the temptation to click the Caribou video link on Deusenberg's website, though. It features a band called the Alpen Casanovas, and unless you're an aficionado of Teutonic kitsch, the images may haunt your dreams.

With a set of truly top-notch pickups, the Caribou would hold its own against Kolls, Fanos and the like

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Killer design
+ Factory Plek'd frets
+ Easy playability and controllability
+ Bigsby beating vibrato
+ Decent-sounding pickups

- Generic pickup choice
- Neck heaviness

Some of the original's quirky character may have been lost, but this incarnation of the Caribou is easier to play, more versatile and looks as good as ever

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The **Fender Starcaster £649** has an offset semi-hollow body and two Wide Range humbuckers. Moving upscale, the **Fano RB6 Thinline £3,499** is simply stunning, while **Kauer's Daylighter Express Supreme £2,499** has numerous custom options.

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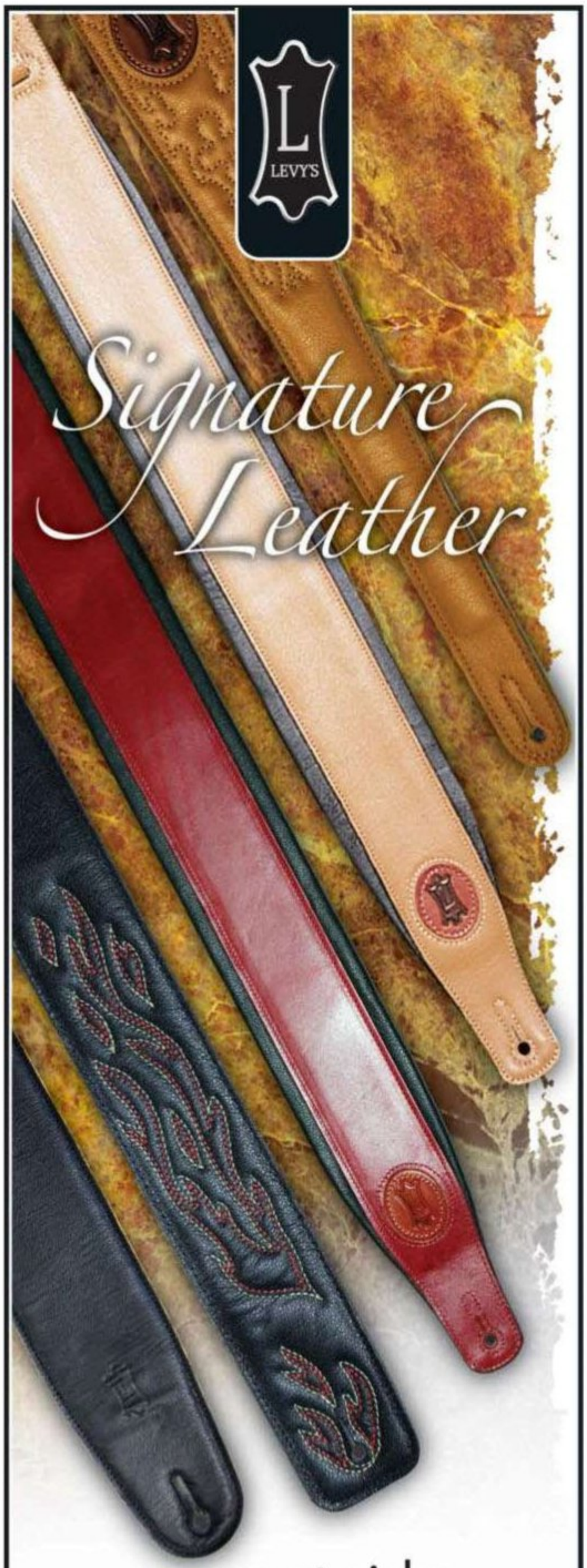

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Supro 1648RT Saturn Reverb & 1650RT Royal Reverb

Although Supro amps may be more evocative for our American cousins, we can all appreciate retro chic. **HUW PRICE** gets the blues...

Every amp company from back in the day seems to have some sort of claim to fame. Supro's is hard to beat, because Jimmy Page used one as his studio amp of choice for many years. Other than that, Supros are mostly the fondly remembered first amps for countless American guitarists of a certain vintage. Now Supro is back in business with a long list of 'name' player endorsees.

The chaps at Pigtronix are also behind the Supro brand, along with well-respected amplifier designer Bruce Zinky. Having designed the Prosonic for Fender, these days he's the boffin responsible for the new Supros.

Supro's latest amps look fantastic. Alarmingly, the distinctive tolex is described as "Rhino hide", but unless rhinos are electric blue (and silver) we can be confident that no endangered species were harmed during production. Kudos is also deserved for selecting cool-looking reflective control knobs rather than 'chickening out' like many of the boutique boys.

At first glance, the Saturn and Royal seem virtually identical. But despite being the same size, the Royal has more knobs, more speakers, more valves and a lot more power. It's also much heavier. Let's take a closer look.

Saturn Reverb

Described as a cathode biased 15-watt combo, the Saturn's 6973 power valves are perhaps its most interesting feature. Designed by RCA during the 1950s, the 6973 was used mostly in jukeboxes, although it featured in various guitar amps – including the Supro Jimmy Page donated to the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame.

This one-channel, open-back combo has reverb and tremolo and it's loaded with an Eminence DT12 ceramic 12-inch speaker voiced to sound like an old Jensen, with a "nice firm bottom". It's valve rectified and, like all the new Supros, it's assembled in New York.

If the Saturn were a singer, it would sound like Tom Waits, because a throaty bark lends it a distinct voicing

In use

If the Saturn Reverb were a singer, it would sound something like Tom Waits after a heavy night, because a throaty and gravelly bark lends the Saturn its distinct voicing. It manifests as a bump in the low-mids that pushes forward the A and D strings of open chords.

There's also a slightly honking and nasal quality to the tone, that makes single coils sound a bit like humbuckers. This impression is compounded by a rolled-off treble response that falls some way short of airy openness.

It's undisputedly retro, somewhat lo-fi in a bluesy sort of way, and there isn't much clean headroom. You can't dial in a wide variety of sounds or mimic other amps, and it colours every guitar you play through it. Happily, it's a likeable colouration – and it suggests intent to retain the Supro sound rather than conceal generic circuitry inside designer cabinets. Both tone controls can be taken to their extremes and still produce some useable sounds. For instance, diming the treble and cutting the bass reveals the Saturn at its twangiest and most cutting, but there's still sufficient body and headroom increases. Reversing these settings can drag some unexpectedly convincing woody jazz tones out of maple-necked Fenders.

Tremolo intensity depends on speed settings, with the effect becoming deeper as speed increases. It never achieves a heartbreaking *Twin Peaks* throb or a *Bang Bang* flutter, but it's decent enough at higher speeds.

Having reverb in front of the tremolo is a period Supro feature, but it accentuates the choppiness of the tremolo effect to the extent that I'd >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

1648RT Saturn Reverb

Fender's **'68 Custom Princeton Reverb £726** is renowned for its tremolo and reverb effects, and classic clean and overdriven tones. The **Bad Cat Bobcat 20 Reverb £1,149** has an extra five watts and it's handwired, just like the homegrown **Gartone Regal 15 £1,650**, which is a two-channel 15/7.5W combo voiced for Plexi and Voxy tones.

1650RT Royal Reverb

For 2x10" alternatives, check out the **Peavey Delta Blues £719** or **Fender Vibrolux '68 Custom £999**, both of which have two channels, reverb and tremolo. Stretching higher, the **Tone King Imperial 1x12" Combo £1,799** is handwired with reverb and a built-in attenuator.

probably use one or the other, as opposed to both together. Some will like the effect, though. The reverb sound is certainly pleasant, but it doesn't quite deliver the "enveloping wash" that Supro promises.

Ultimately, I found the Saturn most enjoyable when cranked up with the treble set around halfway and the bass rolled back. With a Tele, I would happily grind out Stones riffs all day; my Les Paul did that snarly late-60s blues rock thing and anything with Filter'Trons could sound punky or Chet-like, depending on how I picked it.

Royal Reverb

Described as the flagship tube amplifier of the Supro line, the 1650RT Royal Reverb is "designed to deliver superior sonic flexibility and ample headroom, along with enough stage volume to handle any gig".

The cabinet size, basic circuit design and dual 10-inch speaker compliment are all derived from the original Royal Reverb combo amplifier. However, unlike the original, it doesn't have separate chassis for the preamp and power amp, nor point-to-point wiring.

The control layout is identical to that of the Saturn, with the addition of a three-way power switch. The 35-watt Class A mode is cathode biased and the 45-watt mode switches to a Class AB grid bias arrangement. The peak power is 60 watts, with a solid-state rectifier taking the place of the 5U4 tube rectifier.

In use

I started with the 35-watt setting and turned the volume up to the break-up point – around 11 o'clock. Compared with the Saturn, the Royal had a little less sparkle, and it was actually quieter, but the low-mid bump was less noticeable and the bass was tighter.

Maintaining the settings, the 45-watt mode sounded a tad cleaner and the top end gained a bit more clarity, but again the volume stayed more or less the same. I noticed the biggest change in the 60-watt mode, where the transient response was quicker, the low end was significantly tighter and everything had a little more punch.

The tremolo depth also changed dramatically, and it seems to work in a more conventional and effective manner in 60-watt mode. Depth settings that are barely audible in 35-watt mode become increasingly strong and powerful as you switch to higher power.

Like most powerful amps, the Royal needs a bit of volume before it really comes to life. With volume set around 2 o'clock, it opens out and begins to sparkle in a way that the Saturn can't match. Both the 45-watt and 60-watt modes scoop the mids into a blackface direction, but bizarrely, the 35-watt mode always seems loudest. In practice, the power switch serves more as a headroom and transient shaper than a level control.

Like most powerful amps, the Royal needs a bit of volume before it really comes to life. Around 2 o'clock, it opens out and begins to sparkle

Given the wider frequency response, the tone controls have more to work with, so the Royal is much more versatile. You can still do the bluesy lo-fi thing, but the Royal can also emulate a range of classic US and UK tones. Like the Saturn, it has a smooth and chewy overdrive characteristic that stops short of high-gain crunch.

Although you may find street prices cheaper than those quoted here, the price tags nudge the bottom end of the boutique market, but the same can't be said of the electronics. Discerning ears will hear the difference, too. Much as I wanted to be blown away by these Supros, both fall slightly short of the pretty, harmonically complex treble and supernatural touch sensitivity I associate with really nice hand-built amps. They also sound a little dull when you turn down your guitar's volume control, regardless of whether you have a treble bleed capacitor. All that said, they're certainly worth trying because there's much to like here, particularly in the case of the more versatile 2x10 Royal Reverb.

Both Supros look stunning, clad in striking blue 'Rhino hide' tolex

The Royal Reverb adds a three-way power switch to the Saturn's control layout

KEY FEATURES

Supro 1648RT Saturn Reverb

- **DESCRIPTION** Cathode biased Class A 15-watt one-channel combo with spring reverb, tremolo. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £1,149
- **POWER RATING** 15 watts
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 6973, 1x 5U4
- **FRONT PANEL** Volume, bass, treble; reverb; speed & depth
- **SPEAKER** 1x12" Supro (Eminence) DT12
- **DIMENSIONS** 23 5/8" x 16" x 10 ½"
- **WEIGHT** 40lbs/18kg
- **CONTACT** JHS 01132 865 381 www.suprousa.com

Guitar VERDICT

+ Fine looks and finish quality
+ Characterful tone
+ Low-volume breakup

– Not particularly controllable from guitar volume
– Reverb, tremolo underwhelming

Maybe the pick of the pair for low-volume applications, especially for drive, but some may struggle with the lack of clarity and limited depth of onboard effects

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Supro 1650RT Royal Reverb

- **DESCRIPTION** Switchable Class A (35W) or Class AB (45W/60W) one-channel combo. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £1,249
- **POWER RATING** 35/45/60 watts
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 5881/6L6, 1x 5U4
- **FRONT PANEL** Volume, bass, treble; reverb; speed & depth; 35W/45W/60W power switch
- **SPEAKER** 2x10" Supro (Eminence) CR10
- **DIMENSIONS** 23 5/8" x 16" x 10 ½"
- **WEIGHT** 65lbs/29kg

Guitar VERDICT

+ Wider range of tones
+ Low-volume breakup/high headroom
+ Deep tremolo at higher power

– Sounds best cranked up
– Footswitch not supplied

The power switch is a clever and effective feature that adds dynamic flexibility to a fine-sounding amp, but opinions may differ where the pricing is concerned

8/10

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GOOD VIBES

This hypnotically haunting effect takes you on a trip back to the '60s. Like the original Uni-Vibe®, it uses photocells to create chorus and vibrato with a warm, undulating, liquid groove for a sound and response that's true to the classic design. Boosted power rails provide 21st century definition and headroom, and an expression pedal input puts free-form control for both speed and intensity at your feet. Very groovy! **Power supply included.**

BAD STONE PHASE SHIFTER

A reincarnation of the highly sought after pedal now in a nano package and faithful to the original circuit design. The Bad Stone was the first phaser to employ variable feedback and features six stages of phase shifting plus a manual mode that lets you freeze the phase. It's full on phaser bliss! **9V battery included.**

NEW FROM

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Est. 1968

Hughes & Kettner TriAmp Mark 3

H&K claims this "might be the most intelligent, versatile tube amplifier the world has seen." **RICHARD PURVIS** puts it to the test...

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Fifteen valves?! Is this a guitar amplifier, or a Victorian steam engine? Well, Hughes & Kettner might well argue that it's actually a whole collection of amps in one box – and that's 'amps' as in 'amps', not digital emulations. The TriAmp Mark 3 is a straight-up all-valve head, but the clever part is that its switching tricks go beyond preamp channels, and include the output valves too.

Those six big bottles work as three distinct pairs, which can be swapped out for different types and engaged in twos, in fours, or all at once – that's seven combinations, multiplied by six preamp channels to offer a total of 42 flavours. Add the footswitchable boost to each one and that makes 84. Should be enough to be getting on with, eh?

But it's not all about versatility, so let's begin by stepping back to take in the whole picture of this large, heavy and promisingly expensive unit. Made in Germany, it has H&K's usual clear plastic fascia above a full-width control panel, all illuminated in that familiar shade of electric blue... or not, as we'll see later. Once you've finished counting those tubes, you'll notice the monstrously large (and shiny) transformers.

Well, you can't skimp with an amp that's capable of pushing 150 watts. The exact output depends on the valves fitted – it ships with one pair of EL34s and two pairs of 6L6s – but you're looking at roughly 50 watts per pair. Other types, such as KT66s, can pop right in with no biasing required, though if you want to use whopping-great KT88s you'll need to remove the two holding springs to make room.

The control panel looks complicated, but you won't be using all of it at once: the six preamp channels each have master, main and three-band EQ controls, and there's a section at the far-left with a master volume, plus presence and resonance; these last two can be tweaked in tandem for tuning the overall treble and bass response. Below that, you'll find selector buttons for the three pairs of output valves.

The TriAmp Mark 3 is a straight-up all-valve head, but its switching tricks include the output valves, too

The rear panel includes an 'ambience-emulated' DI output with switchable low-cut LEDs for monitoring the automatic valve biasing, a control for adjusting how hard the noise gate shuts, a valve-buffered effects loop, and even a brightness knob for the blue lights. H&K is nothing if not thorough.

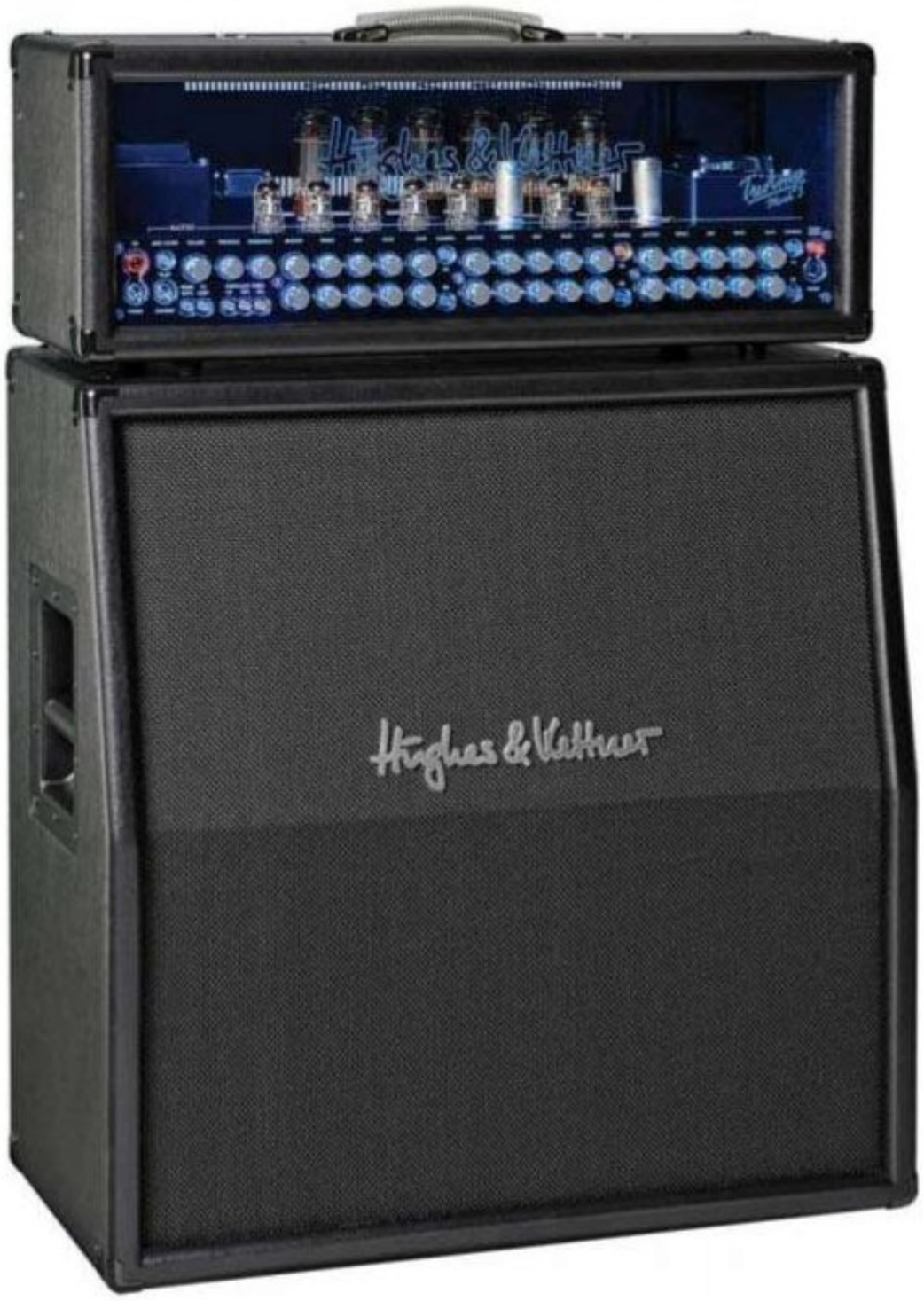
The included MIDI foot controller is quite a piece of hardware itself. In stompbox mode, its seven footswitches are used to select the six preamp channels and engage the boost; there's also a preset mode, which enables you to access 128 stored settings, but you'd be forgiven for not bothering with this – especially as the amp remembers your output valve choices in simple stompbox mode, so you can hop from a clean channel at 50 watts to a dirty >

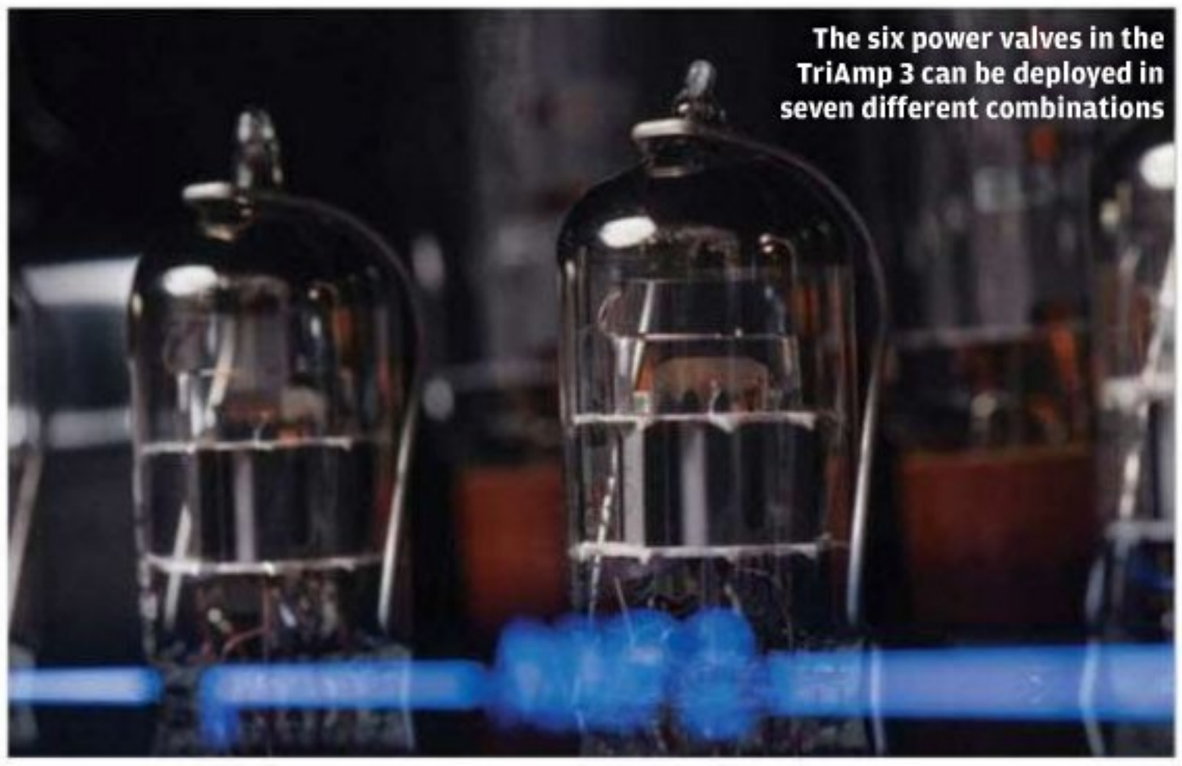
H&K's signature electric blue illumination – other colours are now available...

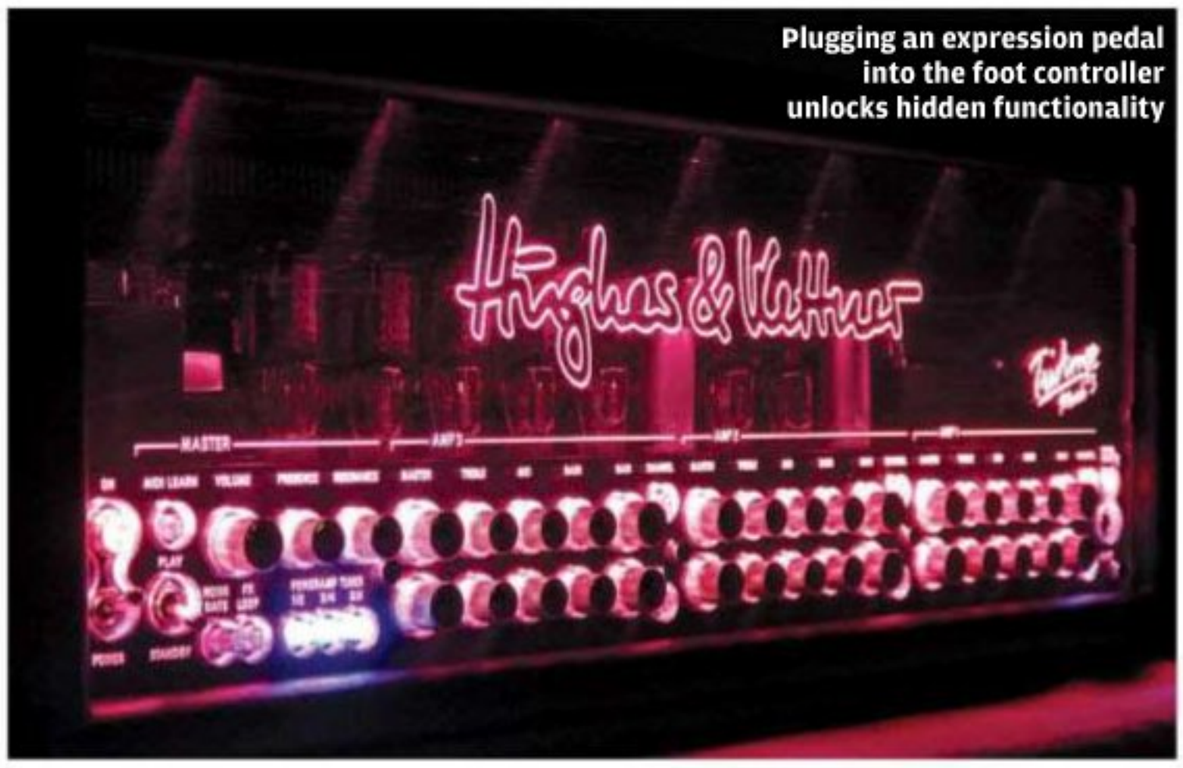
KEY FEATURES

Hughes & Kettner TriAmp Mark 3

- **PRICE** £2,799
- **DESCRIPTION** 150-watt, six-channel valve head with output valve switching. Made in Germany
- **POWER RATING** 150 watts
- **VALVES** 2x pair of 6L6, 1 x pair of EL34s, 9x 12AX7/ECC83
- **FRONT PANEL** Power and standby switches; MIDI learn, noise gate and FX loop buttons; master volume, presence and resonance controls, output valve pair selectors (1&2, 3&4, 5&6); master, treble, mid, bass and gain controls for each of six channels, with channel selector buttons; stomp boost button, guitar input
- **REAR PANEL** 16-, 8- and 4-ohm speaker outputs; ambience-emulated DI out with 'second cabinet mode' and low-cut buttons; TSC (tube safety control) valve bias status LEDs; MIDI in and out/through; noise gate hardness control; FX loop send, return and level control with -10dB and serial/parallel buttons; master insert preamp out and power amp in; control panel brightness control; AES (energy-saving mode) switch
- **ACCESSORIES** TSM-432 MIDI foot controller (included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 740 (w) x 390 (h) x 250mm (d)
- **WEIGHT** 48.5lbs/22kg
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 0113 286 5381 **www.jhs.co.uk**




The six power valves in the TriAmp 3 can be deployed in seven different combinations



Plugging an expression pedal into the foot controller unlocks hidden functionality

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
An even louder German-made multi-channel head is the **Diezel Herbert £1,950**, which pumps out 180 watts when fitted with six KT77s. If a mere 90 watts will do, the **Mesa/Boogie Mark V** offers oodles of channel-switching functionality for **£2,449**.

one at 150 watts if you really want to upset the house engineer. Either way, you'll have no reason to be jabbing at the amp's control panel mid-set – it's all at your feet.

Here's one more bit of magic before we start making noise: plug an expression pedal into the foot controller and you can access other functions hidden away on different MIDI channels – most notably, to override that brightness control for the front of the amp and, even better, to change its colour. Now that is wild – and if a pink-glowing amplifier doesn't distract attention from your fluffed chords, nothing will. It's not mentioned in the manual, but you'll find this stuff around MIDI controllers 085 to 088; just be sure to tell your awestruck fans you read about it here.

In use

The six channels of the TriAmp Mark 3 promise to take us on a trip through amp history. We start with a clean tweed sound on 1A, then move to something with a bit more Vox-like chime on 1B; channel 2A brings 70s Marshall grind, while 2B ups the aggression for something more like a JCM800; with 3A, we're into the 90s with Boogie-style saturation, and 3B bumps the preamp gain higher again. Tempting though it is to dive into the heavy stuff, let's move up through the gears...

Well, the cleans certainly sound pretty good. You're not going to match the squidgy responsiveness of a little vintage classic with a high-tech leviathan such as this, of course, but channels 1A and 1B both sound pleasantly rich and clear, with bags of low end, and can be nudged into restrained break-up.

Moving along to the Marshall-influenced voices, we soon discover there's more going on here than just differing levels of gain – 2A is crisp and full, perfect for old-school rock riffing, but 2B sounds almost alarmingly bright in comparison. Single-coil pickers may find this positively unpalatable, especially with snarly EL34s selected, but attack it hard with meaty humbuckers and you'll be in 80s stadium rock heaven.

The last two channels are where you might find the switchable output valves most useful of all. Everything here is as sweet and powerful as a truck load of Fruittella, but while 6L6s sound best for smooth and creamy lead work, flicking over to EL34s gives more focus and definition to chords and riffs. It's a subtle but wonderfully clear illustration of the fundamental differences between American and British amplifiers... in a German chassis.

The output level does not audibly double when you go from two valves to four, of course, but you do feel a right old thump of extra power – and with all six working, the only question is whether to be more worried about your speakers or the ears of your sobbing, pleading bandmates.

The resonance control is brilliant, allowing you to keep the body of the tone fairly stiff or dial in just the right amount of bloom; while presence works as normal on clean settings, but has been designed to behave differently with high gain, leaping quite suddenly into fizziness near the top of the dial. Whether or not that's useful, overall this is a neat final shaping stage – including a master volume that keeps things surprisingly punchy at low levels.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Amazing breadth of classy rock tones
+ Easy six-way channel-switching
+ Extra functionality via MIDI if you want it
+ Still sounds decent at bedroom levels

– It's extremely hefty...
– ...and so is the price tag

Chameleon-like in sound as well as colour, the new TriAmp is effectively several distinct amps in one... and they're all good

9/10

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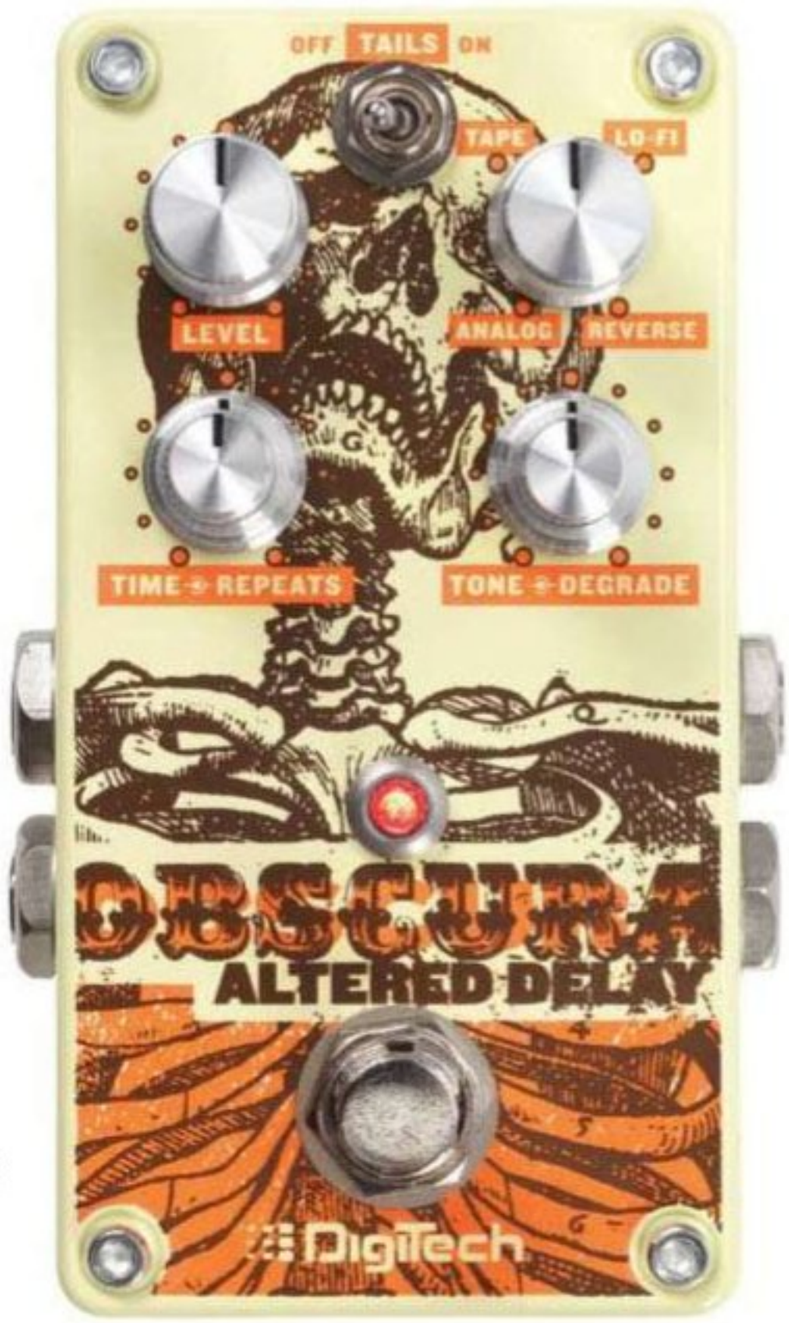

DigiTech Obscura Altered Delay

DigiTech's new delay is an analogue-style tone mangler with digital flexibility. **MARCUS LEADLEY** gets down and degraded...

KEY FEATURES

DigiTech Obscura Altered Delay

- **PRICE** £129
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital delay with analogue simulations, made in China
- **CONTROLS** Stereo delay time, tap tempo, delay repeat hold, tails on/off switch, true bypass, stereo 1/4" inputs & outputs w/ true stereo processing,
- **FEATURES** Effect on/off LED indicator, soft touch vacuum switch, includes StompLock & pedalboard hook & loop pad, 9V DC external power supply
- **DIMENSIONS** 110 (L) x 67 (W) x 50mm (D)
- **CONTACT** Sound Technology 01462 480000 **www.digitech.com**

If you think digital delay is all about precision cleanliness, think again. This new retro-delay simulator takes vintage tones and mangles them quite beautifully.

Like other newly-released pedals from DigiTech, the Obscura Altered Delay continues the retro-alchemic graphic art theme. This time, the top panel features a distorted skeleton – metal pedals have used this sort of iconography for years – but this is actually an illustration commissioned by the 16th century anatomist Andreas Vesalius for his *De humani corporis fabrica* series of books. What's it doing here? Maybe indicating the unit's seriously invasive and almost surgical sound-shaping capabilities.

While this is a digital delay, it really wants to be an analogue pedal; the selector offers an analogue 'bucket-brigade' emulation and a tape delay simulator. Even the lo-fi option is an emulation of retro 8-bit digital delay. The fourth mode, reverse, is a texture-generator whose digital credentials seem almost irrelevant. Just in case you have any doubts that this is a contemporary pedal, however, it can function as both a mono or stereo delay, and there's a useful tap tempo feature.

The level control lets you blend delay with your basic sound (for reverse mode, it controls only the repeat level, as none of your original signal is presented). Two stacked knobs control time/repeats and tone/degrade. Finally, there's the tails mini toggle – with this on, the delay continues to decay when the effect is bypassed. When set to off, the delay is cut short.

In use

The first three algorithms have the distinct characters of the technologies they model: the first analogue mode has little top end; tape is quite true to the original signal, but warmer and more rounded; and lo-fi is bright and clean. When you adjust the repeats control, analogue drifts off into warm, soupy oblivion, tape gives you a progressive softening, and lo-fi adds gritty distortion. At the lowest degrade setting, it's as if you have three new, fully functional retro delays. Advance it, and all the circuits start misbehaving.

Analogue creates a beautiful receding filter effect that surrounds your playing with warm pulsations; tape goes off into synthesised, but realistic, impersonations of wow and flutter to create a dense, chorus-like vibe. Lo-fi piles on the grit, making it sound as if a distortion pedal has processed the repeats. Reverse is quite difficult to work with; it's hard to play anything that doesn't sound like trippy prog lead, but that may be your thing! Then there's the sonic mayhem you can create by twiddling knobs during a performance. There's even a repeat hold function (accessed by turning the repeats knob fully clockwise) to ensure your sonic sorcery will go on forever...

This is a really fun pedal that enables you to create an array of sounds, rather than providing specific emulations. You don't get very far into exploring the Obscura before you realise it's all about how it handles the degradation of the delayed signals. It develops the limitations of the original technologies to great musical effect.

You don't get far into the Obscura before you realise it's all about how it handles the degradation of the delayed signals

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... For a range of digital delays that emulate analogue kit, **TC Electronic**'s **Alter Ego X4 £199** is excellent. The **Catalinbread Echorec £160** is a great oddball vintage echo. For unmitigated digital flexibility, the **Eventide H9 £489** is unrivalled.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great for modified retro delay sounds
+ Lots of control over delay parameters
+ Stereo in/out for greater flexibility

– No clean digital delay setting
– Reverse mode may prove of limited use
– The graphic art is fun, but the controls can be difficult to read

A great delay that gives you a range of modified vintage tones. If you like mangling your sound, this may be the delay you have been looking for.

8/10

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Audio Kitchen The Small Trees

The Small Trees is an all-valve clean booster and line driver that's hand built here in the UK. **HUW PRICE** checks what's cooking...

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

Audio Kitchen The Small Trees

- **PRICE** £300
- **DESCRIPTION** Clean boost/line driver/attenuator pedal with ECC82 valve and 12V power supply. Made in the UK
- **CONTROLS** Level
- **FEATURES** True bypass footswitch
- **DIMENSIONS** 116 (W) x 91 (D) x 55mm (H)
- **CONTACT** Audio Kitchen 020 8735 0045 **www.audiokitchen.co.uk**

Steve Crow is the designer and builder for Audio Kitchen amps, and his eight-year-old daughter hand paints every box. Coming from a pro sound engineering background, as well as being a guitarist, has informed Steve's attitude towards amp and pedal design. He feels that nothing flatters the tone of a guitar or bass so much as a valve grid, so that's what he uses in all his products.

Inside The Small Trees, there's an ECC82 double triode. The pedal comes with a 12-vault power supply, but an internal transformer steps it up to run the valve at full voltage. The first triode provides the gain and the second triode is configured as a cathode follower to give you a low-output impedance, which can drive long cables with minimal losses.

In use

The phrase 'sonically transparent' used to mean something quite specific. These days, it's not unusual to see it applied to things such as Tube Screamer clones, so The Small Trees is a timely reminder of what 'transparency' actually means.

I first hooked it up with two guitar cables, a 10-footer between my guitar and the pedal and a 15-footer between The Small Trees and the amp. With equalised levels, the bypassed tone was dull, mushy and lifeless. So I plugged into the amp direct for comparison and everything sounded fine.

Switching on The Small Trees made using the two lengths of cable sound just like plugging directly into the amp. The low output impedance makes this pedal a fine line driver, and you could set it to unity gain at the end of a line of pedals for a lossless signal path, though it does add a little additional noise.

Another option is to use The Small Trees as an attenuator. This may seem counter-intuitive, but cranking a valve amp then reducing the signal level using the pedal produces excellent results. The tone retains its clarity and vibrancy rather than going dull or plunky - as always, a treble bleed capacitor helps.

With 16dB of gain, using The Small Trees as a line driver or attenuator may seem wasteful, because it's a fantastic clean boost that just sounds sweeter and plays better the more you crank it. At unity gain, there is subtle bass roll-off, but since the low end fills out as you increase the volume, the slight bass roll prevents muddiness without sounding bass light.

There are innumerable solid-state clean boosts with superb sound quality, and we put The Small Trees up against some serious boutique contenders. None of them could better the finessed treble or touch sensitivity of The Small Trees. Top-quality audio gear is all about small margins, but there's no doubt The Small Trees is in the upper echelons.

Inevitably, this pedal isn't going to win any prizes for versatility and it's not a problem solver, tone shaper or talent substitute. In fact, you can really only get away with a simple switch and knob control arrangement if what is coming out of a stompbox is so good you wouldn't want to mess with it anyway. That's what you get with The Small Trees because Crow's intention to make engaging and earthy-sounding pedals has been fully realised.

Top-quality audio gear is all about small margins, but there's no doubt The Small Trees is in the upper echelons

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... With tone and level controls, the **Effectrode FB-1A £195** is a valve-driven clean boost with frequency shaping. The **Blackstar HT Boost £129** adds treble and bass controls, and if valves aren't essential the **JRAD Archer £149** does the Klon Centaur thing.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Beguiling valve tone
+ Player-friendly dynamic response
+ Improved clarity and bass response
+ Owners can substitute valves
+ Doubles as a DI box
+ Quirky charm

– Slightly increased noise floor
– Must use Audio Kitchen power supply

A stellar all-valve clean boost, combining solid build quality with charm, that you probably won't want to turn off.

9/10

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Amzel Cheshire Cat

The purr-fect friend for distortion tweakers

PRICE $248 **CONTACT** www.amzelelectronics.com

The original blue Cheshire Cat is one of those 'secret weapon' pedals you find yourself wondering about when you sneak a look at someone's setup after a gig. This new, green version boasts higher-quality potentiometers and a smaller footprint.

In other respects, the Cheshire Cat retains its unique appeal: six extremely interactive controls that really enable you to sculpt your sound. Distort and volume are the basics – keep the inject control turned down and you'll have the services of a conventional distortion pedal. Turn it up and you bring the resonance, frequency and accent knobs into play, giving you full access to the Tone Evaporator circuit. This is designed so the tone filter affects only the part of the signal that exceeds the distortion threshold, while leaving your basic guitar sound alone.

In use

With inject all the way down, the basic sound is very usable. With distort at zero, you can set the volume so your pedal level matches your thru level. The result is a very pleasing lift to the guitar's upper mids and a hint of gain – basically, the pedal can function like a high-quality coloured boost.

Edging the distort up soon brings on a very amp-like character, where your playing dynamic controls the balance between clean and distorted sounds. The journey onwards takes you via crunchy chords to a full-on, compressed Velcro-fuzz vibe. If you want to tweak these tones, in a fairly conventional way, you can now turn up the inject knob while making sure the resonance control is set to minimum – which is actually when it's wound fully-clockwise.

The freq knob functions like a basic tone control. Accent manipulates the playing dynamics – increasing it yields a more compressed, softer and valve-like character. You can increase the extent to which these controls shape the distortion by adjusting the inject level. When you're ready to get serious about tone shaping, you start advancing the res knob. This affects the unit's filter response, and the effect is immediately noticeable. With res at full, sweeping the freq knob has an effect like the Q control on an envelope filter, yielding choked tones and vowel-like tonal characters. Somewhere on this trajectory, you inevitably hit an awesome lead sound or a funky lo-fi rhythm vibe.

What's especially nice is that once you find your killer tone you can make it more or less pronounced by using the inject knob like a mix control. This is useful in the studio if you want to adjust the sound for different parts of a song. **ML**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

Pedals that have truly interactive controls never get old because you can't use up their potential. Buy this and grin...

8/10

ThorpyFx Gunshot Overdrive

Growl control from Major Thorpe... a truly 'bomb-proof' drive?

PRICE £184.99 **CONTACT** www.thorpyfx.com

Think you've got a stressful job? ThorpyFx was born when British Army Major Adrian Thorpe got into pedal building as respite from his role as an explosive ordnance disposal specialist. 'Bomb-proof build quality' has become a guitar journalism cliché, but the key distinction here is that Adrian actually knows a great deal more about bomb-proofing than your average effects builder, and this engineering insight has informed his R&D process.

Thanks to the combination of laser-etched stainless steel and purple chicken head knobs, the Gunshot is a seriously attractive unit, and it is tremendously robust too. The chunky, powder-coated baseplate offers kick protection for the knobs and the pedal as a whole is more compact than you might expect at 70 (w) x 145 (l) x 60mm (h). Pedaltrain users will be delighted to learn that it was designed to fit perfectly across two bars of a 'board.

The attention to detail is also apparent when you open the unit by unscrewing its quartet of small hex bolts. On a thick PCB with gold-plated component holes, you'll find metalized polyfilm capacitors, a Burr Brown op amp, metal film resistors with a one per cent tolerance and built-in reverse polarity protection. These are specs usually reserved for high-end audio gear, and the off-board hardware is also premium, with dust-sealed potentiometers and a smooth-action, true bypass footswitch rated at many thousands of cycles. Power is via 9V battery or PSU.

In use

The volume and tone pots are self-explanatory, but the key to unlocking this pedal's potential comes from balancing two discrete gain stages, that are essentially stacked together, with the calibre cascading into the gain control. Winding up the gain introduces a TS-like mid-hump, while the calibre possesses more pronounced lows and highs, so the best results are yielded by balancing both to suit the voicing of your guitar and amp. Don't be alarmed by crackling noises when adjusting the calibre – it works like a bias control, so this is entirely expected.

When you find the sweet spot, the Gunshot is hugely satisfying for everything from throaty 70s rock overdrive to creamy lead tones and even aggressive riff-rock, all with punch, articulation and harmonic content that evokes a high-quality, driven valve amp. There's around 30dB on tap from each gain stage, so any PSU noise is likely to be amplified to a greater degree than it would with a unit such as the JRAD Archer, so look elsewhere for a transparent, low-gain boost. **CV**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

For medium- to high-gain overdrive applications, the Gunshot excels. We look forward to checking out the next pedal that Thorpy has in the works!

9/10

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JOIN THE REVOLUTION

ARTIST: JOE ROBINSON

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BOSS

TAYLOR 614CE £2,922
ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Taylor 614ce

Forget all you know about maple. Taylor's new-look 600 Series is here to challenge your preconceptions. **RICK BATEY** takes a look...

The story with the 2015 Taylor 614ce, in a nutshell, is that we're seeing all the structural and cosmetic changes implemented by new master luthier Andy Powers trickling gradually down through the series. He began by completely reworking the 700s and 800s (we reviewed the 814ce in August 2014), and now it's the turn of the maple 600 Series guitars.

Maple has perhaps one of the most undeserved reps of all guitar woods. Clear, hard, bright, transparent - those are still the first words that come to mind, despite all we know about the variations you can find in vintage Gibsons and Guilds, not to mention archtops. Maple is stable, fairly easy to work, has some beautiful figuring and is - very importantly - sustainable; and now Taylor is aiming to annihilate that 'clear, hard, bright' notoriety once and for all with the four-strong 2015 600 Series... and, trust us, they've gone about the task with quite some vim.

The first big alteration is the introduction of a torrefied sitka spruce top. Torrefaction - a procedure also used by Martin guitars, Bourgeois, Huss & Dalton and others - is a thermal process that aims to improve resonance and lessen the effects of humidity, and it also darkens the colour slightly to a more aged-type hue.

The top finish is still gloss, but thinner than before (Taylor claims just 3.5 thousandths of an inch), revealing the grain lines in a consistent yet appealingly handmade-type way. The top bracing has been redesigned completely, and the back bracing - which is angled, not straight, and stops short of the edges to free up the back for maximum responsiveness - is tweaked specifically to wrestle the best from the maple construction. Protein glues have been used at strategic places to make the most of certain wood-to-wood contact points. It all adds up to a lot of changes.

Picking up the guitar for the first time without glancing inside, you'd hardly guess it was maple at all

Continuing with the theme of challenging our maple expectations, Taylor has stained the back and sides a colour called Brown Sugar - a deep, rich shade that manages to let all the handsome flame of the big leaf maple shine though. Picking up the guitar for the first time without glancing inside, you'd hardly guess it was maple at all. The pickguard is striped ebony, the soundhole rosette is a single band of abalone with bold ebony and grained ivoroid bordering, and the familiar swept-wing Taylor bridge is ebony, with ebony pins and a micarta saddle. The neck, too, is maple - satin-finished this time, but stained the same medium brown. The colouring on the heel is a little patchy, and though the ebony facing at the rear of the headstock with its ivoroid inlay is a posh touch, it just misses the scarf joint where it fades into the neck, giving a slightly >

The Brown Sugar stain on the back and sides is very sympathetic to the maple

KEY FEATURES

Taylor 614ce

- **PRICE** £2,922 (with case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Cutaway Grand Auditorium electro-acoustic. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Solid torrefied sitka spruce top, solid big leaf maple back and sides; maple neck, ebony fingerboard, striped ebony pickguard, pearl rosette
- **HARDWARE** Ebony bridge, bridge pins and binding; nickel closed-gear tuners, Expression System 2
- **SCALE LENGTH** 650mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 23mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **ACTION AS SUPPLIED** 12th fret treble 1.8mm 12th fret bass 2.5mm
- **WEIGHT** 2.1kg/4.6lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (same price)
- **FINISH** Thin gloss on body and headstock, satin neck
- **CONTACT** Taylor Guitars 31 (0) 20 667 6033 **www.taylorguitars.com**

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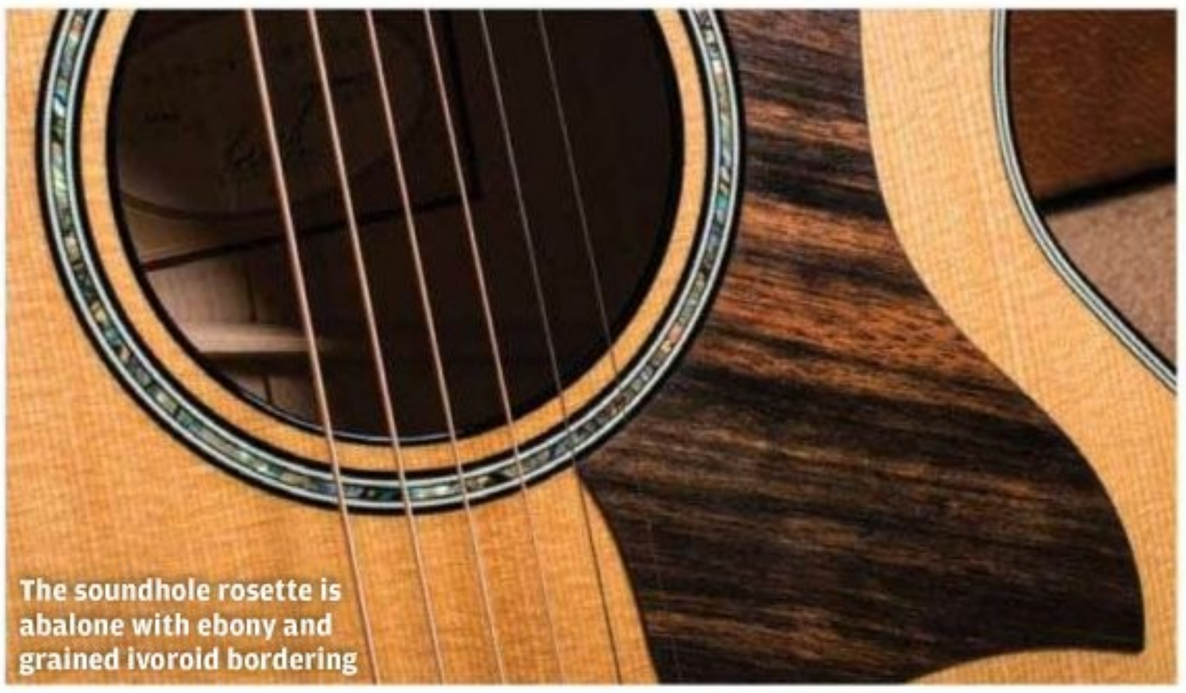
Taylor has employed ivoroid for the headstock purfling and logo above the Tusq nut


The soundhole rosette is abalone with ebony and grained ivoroid bordering

Three controls on the upper rim handle volume, treble and bass

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
One great European-made alternative to the Taylor 614ce would be the **Furch/ Stonebridge Millennium Series 24-SF approx £1,549 plus electronics**, a maple and sitka Grand Auditorium with a choice of five different LR Baggs systems. Though it's not maple, have a look at the mahogany **Martin GPCPA2 £2,479**, a great-sounding all-solid cutaway all-rounder with a Fishman built in. Or how about the **Takamine P6JC**? **£1,599**. It's a solid spruce/flamed maple sunburst-top cutaway item with the CTP-3 Cool Tube preamp all ready to go.

odd look. Around the front, we have a feast of ebony: the fingerboard with its grained ivoroid 'wing' inlays, and the gloss-finished headstock facing with its matching truss rod cover. More ivoroid is employed for the headstock purfling and the logo, and the nut is Tusq.

Taylor has long since nailed the art of the easy-playing neck, and this slim example with its slightly wide 38mm nut, gently rounded in profile but with just a touch of 'V' in the lower reaches, is comfy and appealing. The action is low all over; with a pick, it's possible to force out some fret buzz on the lower strings below the fifth fret, but a touch more relief would sort that.

Sound

All the careful voicing notwithstanding, the 614ce doesn't sound totally unlike a typical maple guitar. There's good clarity here and a contemporary evenness of sound, but it's the mellowness, the complexity, the surprising amount of thump from the bass and the notable roundness of the attack to the trebles that raises the eyebrows. The strings surely have a bit to do with this - these are Taylor's special-spec Elixirs with a heavy top and a skinny bottom - but single-note lines are endowed with a softness and impact that's still quite unusual for maple.

As ever with Taylor's Grand Auditoriums, this guitar delivers well both as a fingerpicker and a flatpicker, but it's as a vocal back-up guitar that it perhaps shines best, with a sensitive, bouncy midrange and a stentorian richness at the bottom end that all adds up to a fine, full pillow of sound.

The ES2 system represents a move back to the centre-ground of accepted electro-acoustic tone after the complex body sensors and neck pickup of the ES1. Here, the three sensors are placed just behind the bridge saddle, rather than beneath it, and you can fine-tune the string balance by altering the pressure on the sensors via the bridge tension screws.

The sensors are linked to three upper rim-mounted centre-detented controls for volume, treble and bass (though there's no mid control, you can access a degree of mid-scoop by advancing the treble and bass). Inside the guitar, on the edge of the circuit board behind the controls, is a mini switch for phase reverse - not easy to reach without putting the guitar flat on your lap and forcing your hand past the strings.

It's a pretty simple, what-you-see-is-what-you-get arangement, and though the tone is in the bridge-piezo ball park and has a fairly breathy attack, it's likeably quack-free, with no undue harshness. The battery is located by the endpin, and it's a cinch to change.

Taylor's success with the new 614ce, to force an automobile analogy, has been to coax a high-end, luxury experience out of a guitar that you might have expected to offer a rather harsh ride. To push that comparison further, it's a bit like a Lexus: totally smooth, very well-honed, hard to fault... and definitely not cheap. Looking at the bigger picture, we're going to see a lot more torrefied spruce this year than last, and the use of sustainable maple in high-end guitars is surely only going to increase as the decades roll on. If the 2015 614ce is a harbinger of that sonic future, then the future's looking - and sounding - pretty good.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Fine all-round sound
+ ES2 system works well
+ Sweet-playing neck
+ Good factory setup

- Look elsewhere for mid EQ, a built-in tuner, etc
- It's certainly pricey

This Taylor will do everything well, from contemporary fingerstyle to neo-country flatpicking, and it's a fine singer's guitar with easy-to-use electronics.

8/10

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Rickenbacker 4003S 4-string bass

One of the world's most individualistic brands refreshes a model that will forever evoke Paul McCartney. **GARETH MORGAN** takes a look...

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

Rickenbacker 4003S

- **PRICE** £1,950 (including hardshell case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody passive 4-string bass. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Maple body wings, maple thru neck with 10" radius, 20-fret rosewood fingerboard, Bakelite nut,
- **HARDWARE** RIC bridge and tailpiece, Schaller Deluxe open-gear tuners, chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** 2x standard Rickenbacker single-coil pickups, 2x volume and 2x tone controls, pull-up bridge tone for vintage setting
- **SCALE LENGTH** 845mm/33.25"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.9mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at 1st fret, 23.3mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 12mm at nut, 17mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 9lbs/4.1kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Not yet
- **FINISHES** Mapleglo (as reviewed), Fireglo, Jetglo, Midnight Blue, Ruby, Walnut
- **CONTACT** Rosetti 01376 550 033 **www.rosetti.co.uk**

Rickenbacker's 4003 bass will forever be associated with late Beatles and Wings-era Paul McCartney and Chris Squire from Yes. In fact, neither of these famous British groove-merchants wielded a 4003, instead using the 4001S, produced for 20 years from 1961.

A reworking, the 4003S appeared in 1981, with triangle fingerboard inlays (dots from 1984). It's recently had a spruce-up with the addition of a pull-up vintage setting for the bridge pickup tone control, which accesses the treble punch of the 4001 via a cunning capacitor in the bridge pickup circuit. You still get two dinky single-coil units, the bridge obscured by the chunky chrome pickup guard and housing, and two volumes and two tone controls.

The vista is resolutely Rickenbacker, sporting the crested wave upper-body shape with elongated upper horn

The vista is still resolutely Rickenbacker, sporting the familiar crested wave upper-body shape, with elongated upper horn, that eschews the white binding strip for sleeker lines created by subtly bevelled edges, which are more pronounced in the upper waist section (for a bit of rib-cage comfort). The lower bout is a half-teardrop affair, culminating in a stubby dorsal fin horn, cut away beyond the highest fret for superb access to the upper frets.

As it's a thru-neck construction, the central maple chunk morphs into a comfortably playable neck, not super-slim, but holding no fear, and the unbound rosewood 'board, alongside 20 medium jumbo nickel frets, displays dot markers on the face and top edge.

Two sections of walnut are added past the bakelite nut to create that familiar headstock with its wave-like scroll on the furthest edge, housing four chrome Schaller Deluxe open-gear tuners, although it's dominated by the expansive black logo'd truss rod cover. The 4001S's bridge is the shiny, super-chunky chrome RIC bridge/tailpiece unit that you always get on these instruments... so it must be good, right?

In use

The 4003S balances nicely and the neck proves surprisingly playable, the superb upper-register access being a real boon if you want to get melodic. The basic tone is well balanced, too, with decent width, a growling edge to the E string, solid midrange and just a touch of high-mid honk informing clarity and highs with zingy attack. Use either tone control for shaping – they don't work together – and you'll find a sanitised and more versatile version of the flat-out sound, with less rasp and more of a true full-range feeling.

The bridge pickup dominates volume-wise, so soloing it delivers a gnarlier, more throaty version of the twin vibe, with snappy, barking punch and a more rubbery quality to the core of your note. Backing off the tone softens this up a bit, albeit with only one real audible variation from about half cut.

With the neck pickup, the focus is far more on warmth and fundamentals, with a pleasing woodiness, even if it is a bit weak-sounding.

Pulling on the bridge tone for the Vintage option leeches the bass-life out of the 4003S's sound, although it adds another justifiable colour to the tonal palette. If you dig in, you'll unearth the dry, rubbery rasp that is at the core of many of McCartney's Ricky-fuelled grooves, while a harder pick attack will have you riffing in Chris Squire style before you can say... Yes.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Classic Rickenbacker styling
+ Nicely varied tonal palette
+ Beautifully well put together with excellent build quality

– Only 20 frets
– Pickguard makes fingerstyle awkward and is fiddly to remove

The 4003S delivers the classic treble-fuelled Ricky tone, as well as a solid sound for basic groove playing

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... **Musicman's Classic Sabre 4-string, £2,029** mixes distinctive and more versatile sounds. **Sandberg's excellent California TT, from £1,399**, is hand-built with punchy single coils, and at **£2,364** the **Roscoe Century Standard Plus 4JM 4-string** has it all.

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Six of the best

Stand out from the crowd at your local open mic night with these tone and performance-enhancing essentials

G7th Performance 2 capo

PRICE £29 **CONTACT** www.g7th.com

To say that British company G7th makes the best capos on the planet sounds like hyperbole, but it isn't. The original Performance unit was a revelation, but 2014's iteration made it even better, with improved ergonomics and a lighter overall weight designed to reduce the risk of neck dive.

The squeeze-on, squeeze-off action is quick and easy to use, and in the heat of battle this is the most in-tune, tone-preserving capo we've ever tested. The Performance 2 comes in silver, satin black and gold-plated finishes for steel-string instruments, and there's a dedicated version available for the flatter fingerboard radius of classical guitars. For singer-songwriters on the move, this is a gigbag essential – and the price makes it a no-brainer.

TC Ditto Looper

PRICE £65 **CONTACT** www.tcelectronic.com

Ed Sheeran's monumental success is conclusive proof that an acoustic guitar and a looper are all you need – along with a fair bit of talent – to propel yourself to world domination. We've heard plenty of loopers in action at open mic nights in recent years and our advice would be to avoid over-complicating things; for audio quality and sheer simplicity in a pocket-sized enclosure, not to mention great value for money, the Ditto is nigh-on impossible to beat.

For audio quality and simplicity in a pocket-sized enclosure, not to mention value for money, the Ditto is nigh-on impossible to beat

Logjam Prolog

PRICE £99 **CONTACT** www.logjam.net

Add a shot of rhythm to your blues and get the punters' feet a-tapping with this slab of solid sapele that allows you to introduce pseudo kick drum sounds into your performance. Its apparent simplicity belies the variety of sounds you can get out of it, depending upon not only where you strike it, but also the velocity at which your foot hits it, and even the type of shoes you are wearing. Its own non-slip rubber sole also ensures that it won't go skidding out of reach, even if the previous act has spilt a pint all over the stage...

Dunlop 5015SI Slide And Pick Stand Holder

PRICE £5.99 **CONTACT** www.westsidedistribution.com

OK, so the weekly open mic night at the pub on the corner of your road isn't exactly Live Aid, but you still don't want to be fumbling clumsily around like a high-ranking football executive during a tax investigation at the precise moment in your performance at which you need to reach for either your slide or a spare plectrum. This simply-made, high-quality rubber solution from Dunlop mounts onto most standard mic stands, looks more professional than gaffer tape and is guaranteed to spare you from potentially embarrassing moments; it's dirt cheap, too.

The nickel alloy Monel largely fell out of favour during the 1970s, as it's difficult to machine, but Martin recently brought it back and boy are we glad

Martin Retro Monel Strings

PRICE £8.99 **CONTACT** www.westsidedistribution.com

Until they are well and truly played in, a standard set of 80/20 bronze acoustic strings can sound rather brash and, in combination with a basic piezo pickup arrangement, almost synthetic when plugged directly into a pub PA system. The nickel alloy Monel largely fell out of favour during the 1970s, as it's difficult to machine, but Martin recently brought it back and boy are we glad; Monel strings don't simply sound broken-in straight out of the packaging, they unlock a rich woodiness that, particularly when used in combination with a mahogany-bodied instrument, imparts an old, rootsy flavour that's extremely addictive.

Fishman Aura Spectrum DI

PRICE £299 **CONTACT** www.jhs.co.uk

Billed as the "complete tone solution for the acoustic musician", this chunky stompbox will fit into the outer pocket of your gigbag, but provide a range of pro-level tone-shaping options. Three-band equalisation, compression and feedback suppression are joined by an onboard tuner, plus the real ace up its sleeve: Aura Acoustic Imaging Technology. This allows you to blend the signal from the pickup system on your guitar with any of a huge online library of 'images' of studio-recorded acoustic instruments.

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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

BRAD ABOUT GUITARS

Brad Williams' work recording guitars in the television industry has seen him gather a vast collection of instruments. **LARS MULLEN** takes the tour...

Brad Williams handles audio sound designs for an international TV company, a job which frequently involves recording guitars and necessitates getting an authentic sound from a classic model from a particular era. Naturally, this has led to Brad amassing a sizable personal guitar and bass collection over the years – which has also served him well in his secondary career as a live and session guitarist. Brad takes up the tale and takes *Guitar & Bass* on a guided tour through his enviable collection: "I've gathered quite a few for their specific working abilities, which have also proved invaluable within a career as a touring guitarist and session player.

"When I was just 10, I was obsessed with recording my own songs, making amps out of old stereograms and guitars, including a Telecaster I shaped from my mum's kitchen bread board.

"My older sister played The Stones, Zeppelin, Lynyrd Skynyrd and the like flat-out in our house. I find it a bit scary now as an adult, how I understood it all, being so young.

"The turning point was AC/DC. When they were a raw band, I played *Bad Boy Boogie*, from the *If You Want Blood...* album a billion times. I was pleased that I had found something that I could identify with, something I felt was mine.

"This SG dates from 2008, and I feel it is the only way that I can get close to Angus Young's sound. I'm sure all that mahogany, scale length and body depth is all part of the sonic equation.

"I was always very out of step with what was fashionable in the guitar and amp world, mainly because I couldn't afford it. This was in the 80s, when guitarists were enjoying the pointy headstock period, hence I got a really good deal on this Gibson Les Paul, which I used through a beaten 60s Marshall half stack with a wah pedal. Both have been with me from the beginning; all my gear is treated with respect, although I use it like I would drive to work in a car every day.

"All my gear is treated with respect, although I use it like I would drive to work in a car every day"

"This would be pre-Slash and before a Les Paul became fashionable again. Then I toured and recorded with Pigs From A Gun, and with Mike Peters from The Alarm with a Peavey Vandenberg. The Floyd Rose still comes in handy for deep dive bombs here and there when I record TV and film soundtracks. It still sounds awesome through this devastatingly loud Peavey VTM 120-watt head. Eventually, I had a ton of session work at some >

Opposite page, top, clockwise from left, **Gibson SG and Gibson Les Paul; Peavey Vandeberg headstock; Peavey Vandeberg (left) and Warwick Rock Bass Corvette** *Bottom, left to right,* **Gibson Firebird; PRS SE Custom (left) and Fender '68 Precision Bass; Gibson Les Paul Junior and chambered Gibson 60s Tribute Les Paul**

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Private Collection

cool studios, including The Church – run by Dave Stewart. My dear old '68 Fender Precision is a first choice every time for bass sessions. It's really dried out, which I'm sure contributes to the tonal character.

"I kind of relate this Gibson Firebird 2012 Anniversary model as a show-off Tele. I had an older one with banjo pegs, but I couldn't get on with it.

"The bass player in my band, Stone Blower, had a Thunderbird bass. They're great stage guitars. I adore the mini humbucker at full tilt, as I do a decent P-90, which I have here on this Les Paul Junior. It's a Japanese import with a slightly slimmer body; again, I love the whole simplicity Tele-type concept. Best of all, though, the P-90 just gives that little extra grunt."

With a job as exacting and demanding as Brad's, it's essential that his guitars are as reliable as possible, as he explains.

"I need guitars that play and sound great and don't constantly need setting up or tuning, and if I want a real twang, it's a Tele every time. In relation to Malcolm Young's strong rhythm playing, although he used a Gretsch, of course, I acquired this mahogany-bodied Thinline model first. I love the simplicity, sound and reliability. I think the only limitations on a Tele are technical ones, which I've overcome by replacing hardware, upping the internal screening, and installing over-wound pickups; my favourites are some units from The Creamery.

"I also have this Mexican Baja Tele. I don't see any reason to pay for a more expensive model. I originally bought this Chris Shiflett Mexican Tele Deluxe signature model, not for the Foo Fighters connection, but with the intension of modifying it, but it's too good to change and I think it outshines some of the USA-made Fenders for the price.

"I need guitars that play and sound great and don't constantly need setting up or tuning"

"This Fender Jaguar was a Japanese-only model, from 2012, and a bit of a hybrid with a thinline-type body with binding and a 24-inch scale. It's a perfectly balanced guitar, both physically and sonically."

While his collection contains so many 'essential' guitars, Brad admits that he still has a yearning to construct his own designs.

"I'd always thought how simple I could make a Strat look," he explains. "I call this next one a Strelecaster, with a single Tele neck pickup fitted to a Strat body. Inside, it has what they >

Opposite page, top, left to right, **Mahogany-bodied Thinline Fender Telecaster (left) and Japanese-only Fender Jaguar; Mexican Fender Baja Telecaster (left) and Chris Shiflett Mexican Telecaster Deluxe**
Middle, left to right **Odessa DeadBeat (left) and custom 'Firecaster'; Fender Telecaster Baja (left) and custom 'Strelecaster'**
Bottom, left to right, **Fender Stratocaster with Texas Specials (left) and Fender Lead II; Faded Daphne Blue Squier Stratocaster (left) and 60s Reissue Strat**
This page, above, left to right, **Squier Super-Sonic (left) and Fender Modern Player Starcaster; Pignose electric travel guitar (left) and Maya Gibson ES-175 copy; Gretsch Electromatic (left) and Hagstrom Viking II**

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call the swimming pool routing, it's cavernous, so there's quite an acoustic vibe, a real unique tone. It worked so well, I fitted an over-wound Firebird mini humbucker in the neck position to my 'Firecaster', that's finished in Burgundy Mist.

"I love classic guitars, but I like something unusual as well, like this ultra-cool Odessa DeadBeat finished in Bermuda Blue. This guitar sounds amazing – British builder Mike Wiltshire is the luthier behind these.

"I gave him the measurements for a huge neck profile, we talk about a baseball bat neck, but this exceeds that by a mile, it's massive. It's a total tone machine, with an overwound Lollar P-90. The body is European ash, the neck is maple and we used pau ferro for the fingerboard, hence it ain't no lightweight.

"I have a few black guitars; this Strat has a nod toward Dave Gilmour's, and is fitted with Texas Specials. I like the 70s vibe with this one, there's a sort of Stranglers vibe about it, like the earlier black Baja Tele. This Fender Lead II is a bit like a cut-down Strat. I believe Eric Clapton's model was the first to start the Hard Rock Cafe vibe with guitars on the walls.

"I fell out of love with Strats for a while after having a host of different models, so I thought I'd just have a Squier for the sake of it. This faded Daphne Blue model 60s reissue was so good it remained a favourite for a long time, and was used on a lot of film scores.

"So Strats are back in fashion for me. I've always been a fan of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Hendrix; this Squire Super-Sonic has the upside-down, left-handed vibe for a right-handed player. The silver sparkle finish has toned down to shades of gold over the years.

"I like to feel the vibrations from a semi-acoustic against your body and the fight against feedback"

"I love the concept of this guitar and the playability, but it just doesn't sound that brilliant, and although it would solve the problem, I'm loathe to change the pickups.

"Thanks to the likes of Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood and Dave Keuning from The Killers, the good old Fender Starcaster has had a new lease of life; this one is a reissue and leans towards a slightly quirky theme, which I like. It's cool-sounding with the Wide Range pickups. I'm looking out for an original at the moment.

"I have a few semi-acoustic guitars, most are quite new, although this 70s Gibson ES-175 copy made by Japanese brand Maya, is a little tired now. I like to feel the vibrations from a semi-acoustic >

Above, left to right, **Recording King Rodeo Sweetheart (left) and Danelectro 59; Recording King Rodeo Sweetheart headstock; Gretsch Rancher G5022CE Jumbo (left) and Eastwood Airline**

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Above, left to right, **Epiphone Jumbo with over-wound P-90 and army field radio controls (left), Hudson Ho-I Little Wing Parlour and Deluxe Gibson (right); Gibson Custom Shop Memphis VOS 330L**

against your body and the fight against feedback. This Hagstrom Viking II semi is beautifully made and very versatile, handling anything from country to heavy metal.

"I originally bought this Recording King Rodeo Sweetheart with the cowboy theme for my kids, but I thought it was so cool that I've nicked it back. I just like ladies on guitars, and several here have the vintage-style pinup stickers on.

"I have a few acoustics that are primarily for writing and recording with, including this Epiphone Jumbo loaded with an over-wound P-90 and controls off an old army field radio from Nebraska, and my '72 Gibson SJ Deluxe Gibson; this guitar is such an inspirational writing tool, and my burning-building guitar.

"I've been asked many times what comes first for me, cosmetics or sound. It's both, like this Eastwood Airline – it sounds fantastic and looks amazing. Jack White is one of many players who have given retro catalogue guitars the exposure they deserve."

Brad's collection also includes a Takamine 12-string, an Epiphone EJ200, two Epiphone Sheratons and a P-90 loaded Casino, and finally he strikes a cool pose with his favourite Gibson semi-acoustic, an ES-330.

"Yeah, it's a limited-edition Gibson Memphis VOS ES-330L, the closest – I feel – to a vintage classic. I love the Cherry finish. I feel that a lot of the original spec contributes to the sound – from the under-wound dog-eared P-90s to animal hide glue used in the construction.

"Once again, it reflects my need for authentic guitars that deliver original sounds, which is so important in my job. I hate it to sound pretentious, I'm not against new gear, but I'm attracted to the original birth of rock music sounds. I personally feel that you can't replicate them without anything but the real thing. I'm lucky, as a lot of the gear I have here I originally bought as a necessity, and it has become vintage with age."

"A lot of the gear I have, I originally bought as a necessity, and it has become vintage with age"

For more information on Brad Williams and Stone Blower visit: www.reverbnation.com/bradwilliams

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REALITY CHECK

Repros of vintage guitars have come a long way in recent years, and spotting a counterfeit is getting ever harder. **PHIL HARRIS** charts the rise of the bogus 'Burst...

PHIL HARRIS

This industry legend has been a guitar fanatic since childhood, quickly acquiring a Les Paul obsession that has never left him. During his long professional playing career, he provided lead guitar for the likes of Edgar Broughton (as well as, briefly, Thin Lizzy), before starting a guitar hire company specialising in vintage gear. A long-time consultant for the likes of Sotheby's and Christie's, Phil's encyclopedic knowledge of classic gear (most of which he's played and/or owned at some point) is beyond compare.

Many times over the years, I've been asked how you spot a fake vintage guitar. The first fakes were nicknamed 'lash-ups' or 'bodges' because they were later models that had been converted into something that looked like an original. Today, those guitars wouldn't fool a blind man, but these were different times.

The first guitar to become an iconic instrument was the 1958 to 1960 Les Paul Standard. By 1968, it hit the heady heights of £400 a piece. Gibson stopped making them in 1960 and then came back in '68 with the Les Paul Custom and the Goldtop with P-90s, followed closely by the Deluxe.

The first 'lash-up' I saw was in the early 70s. In relation to a 'Burst, the '68 Goldtop was still a matter of pennies. It had P-90s instead of PAFs, but otherwise was the same spec as a 1960. When you stripped the gold back, the top was always two-piece maple – the same as a 'Burst. Even a 1950s Goldtop was still worth OK money – it wouldn't be a guitar you'd cut up, so the best candidate was always a '68 Goldtop.

You could buy one for about £200 in 1972, or pay £600-800 for a 'Burst; so you could get it sprayed, buy a set of humbuckers and have a Standard-esque instrument. The main thing that had changed was the binding, which was very fat in the cutaway and fatter all around the top of the body. Also, the headstock pitch on all Gibson guitars had altered by that time, so a '68 kept to that later spec. You didn't have reissue parts, so any other Gibson that had clear-top knobs, such as an ES-125 or a Les Paul Junior was never safe – the knobs would go missing. You see a lot of guitars today that have been pilfered for early 'lash-ups'.

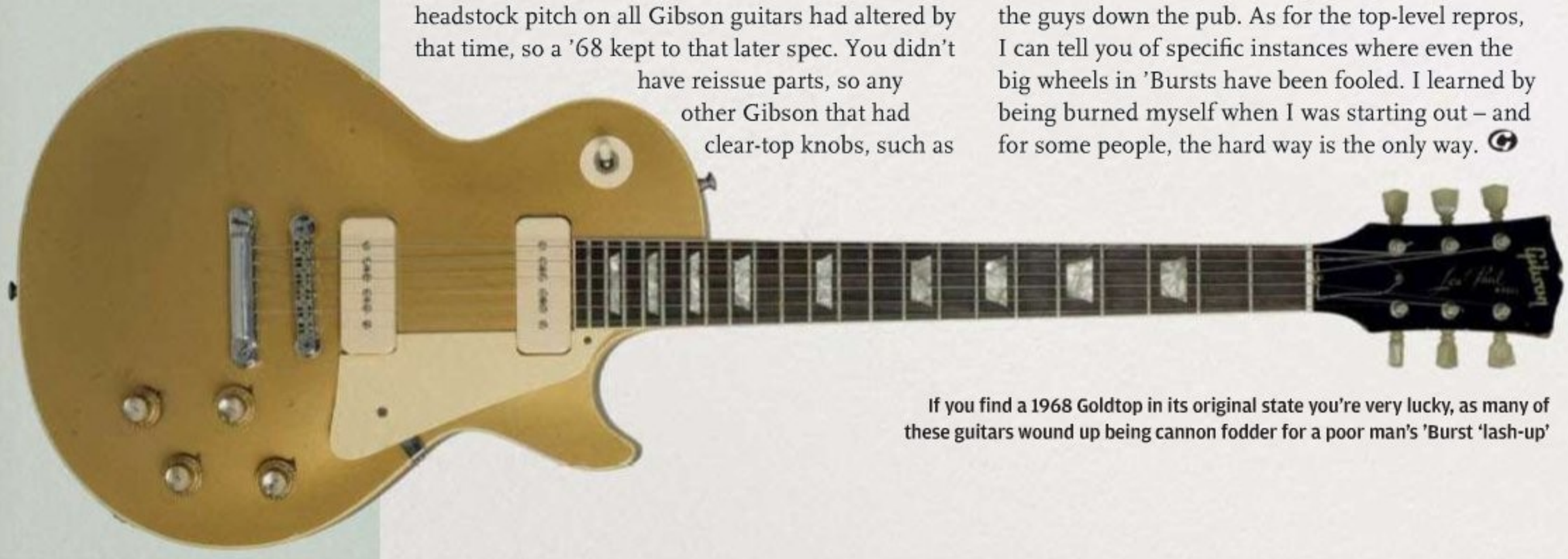
People used to bring these guitars to me to verify if they were originals. A lot of the time, I had to be the bearer of bad news. I'd pull out my genuine 'Burst and say 'this is the way it should be'; I'd tear it to pieces and the poor sod would go home crying.

My eldest son would have been seven in 1982. One day, we walked into a famous guitar shop in the West End. There were four Les Pauls on the wall – one '59 and three sunbursted '68s with polyester finishing – all being sold as '58 or '59 'Bursts. My son turned to me and went "Daddy look! They're all lash-ups!" The guy who managed the shop growled at me, "I'm not being nasty, but get him out the shop now!"

I learned by being burned myself when I was starting out – and for some people the hard way is the only way

Today, it's more difficult because you've got reproduction hardware that is getting very close. It's become an art form, and like any artist, all the top builders have a certain style. I can sometimes tell an individual's work by looking at the shapes of the marks he makes or the way he tints his lacquer.

There are places in America where you can take your Gibson '59 re-issue for a 'makeover'. They strip it and put an allegedly authentic finish on there. Structurally, the R9s – a Gibson '59 'Burst reissue – aren't quite correct. You can buy production surrounds, scratchplate, bridge, tailpiece... and fool the guys down the pub. As for the top-level repros, I can tell you of specific instances where even the big wheels in 'Bursts have been fooled. I learned by being burned myself when I was starting out – and for some people, the hard way is the only way.



If you find a 1968 Goldtop in its original state you're very lucky, as many of these guitars wound up being cannon fodder for a poor man's 'Burst 'lash-up'

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Vintage EARLY BRITISH ELECTRICS

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

The solid electric was a novel idea in late-50s Britain, but in five years it went from unknown to industry staple. **PAUL DAY** charts the evolution of UK guitars between 1958 and 1962

Much has been written about British performers prominent during the post-skiffle/pre-Beatles years from 1958-62, but the UK-made electric guitars and basses that appeared in this pioneering period have enjoyed far less literary attention, so it's time to set the record straight. To ensure accuracy, corroborative chronological evidence has come from the pages of *Melody Maker* during that era. This major music weekly gave grudging coverage to the fast growing pop/rock scene, but it also included advertising placed by instrument manufacturers and distributors, while the back was packed with related classified columns and dealer ads. This printed info monitored product developments week by week, providing an accurate guide to what happened and when – unlike the hearsay, hazy recollections and uninformed opinions that all-too frequently pass for fact on the internet.

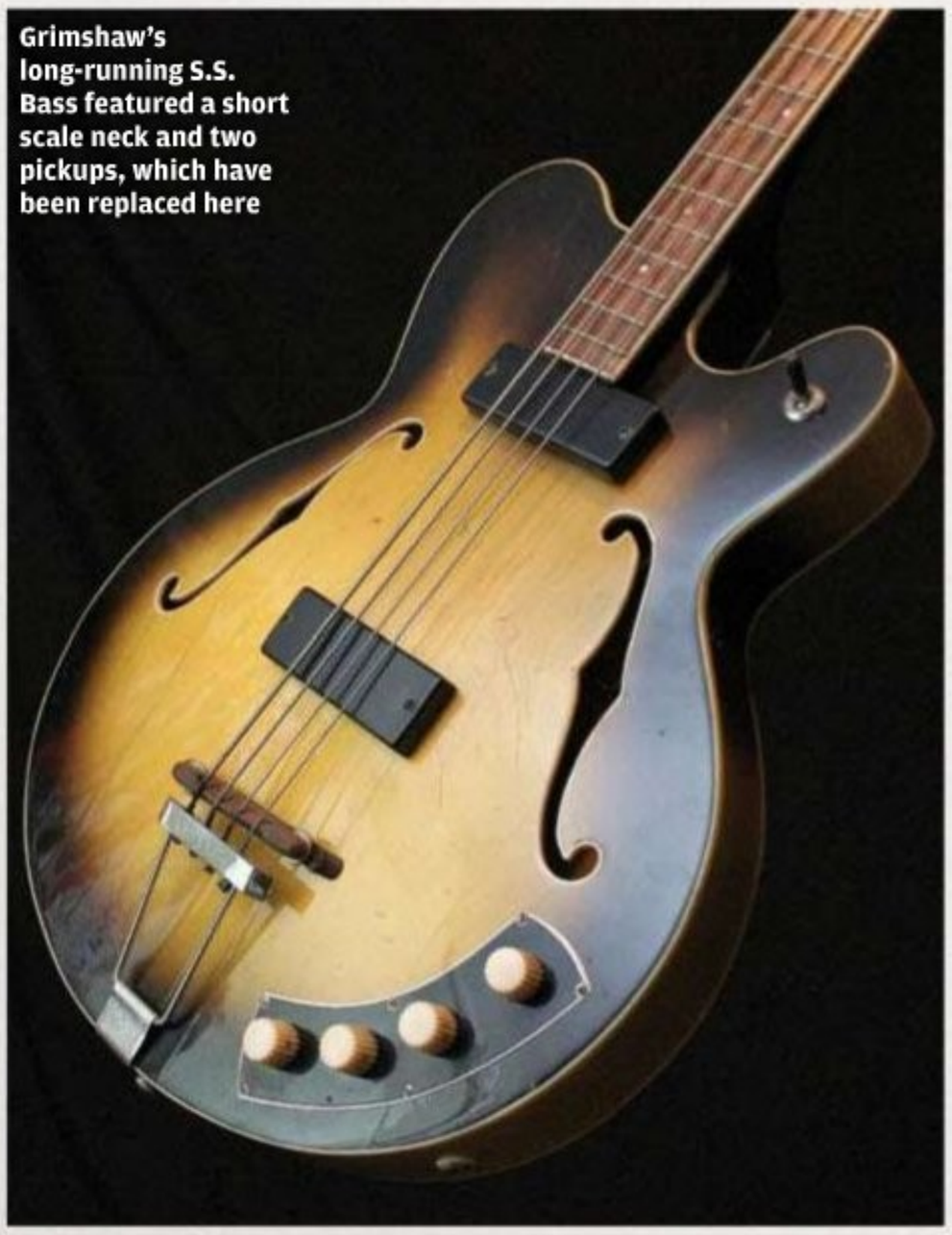
Setting the scene

American rock 'n' roll first hit Britain during the mid-50s, but it was the skiffle craze which followed that inspired countless UK youngsters to pick up a guitar and play. Skiffle music's popularity peaked in 1956-57, and by the next year the urge to go electric and rock was on the rise, although the proper tools of this all-new trade were very hard to come by in a country still slowly recovering from the physical and financial ravages of World War Two.

Even so, demand for electric guitars continued to increase, and although initially this need was met mainly by examples imported from Europe, the commercial potential of offering home-grown opposition soon sparked the start of the British guitar-building business. The next five years subsequently proved to be a hugely formative time in terms of musical evolution and equipment manufacture in the UK. This makes the era arguably as influential as the Beatles-led beat boom that followed in 1963, although it's often overlooked by those historians quick to credit Britain's most famous foursome with every influence and advance.

1958 – imported incentives

Guitar-wise, the cheapest way to switch from skiffle

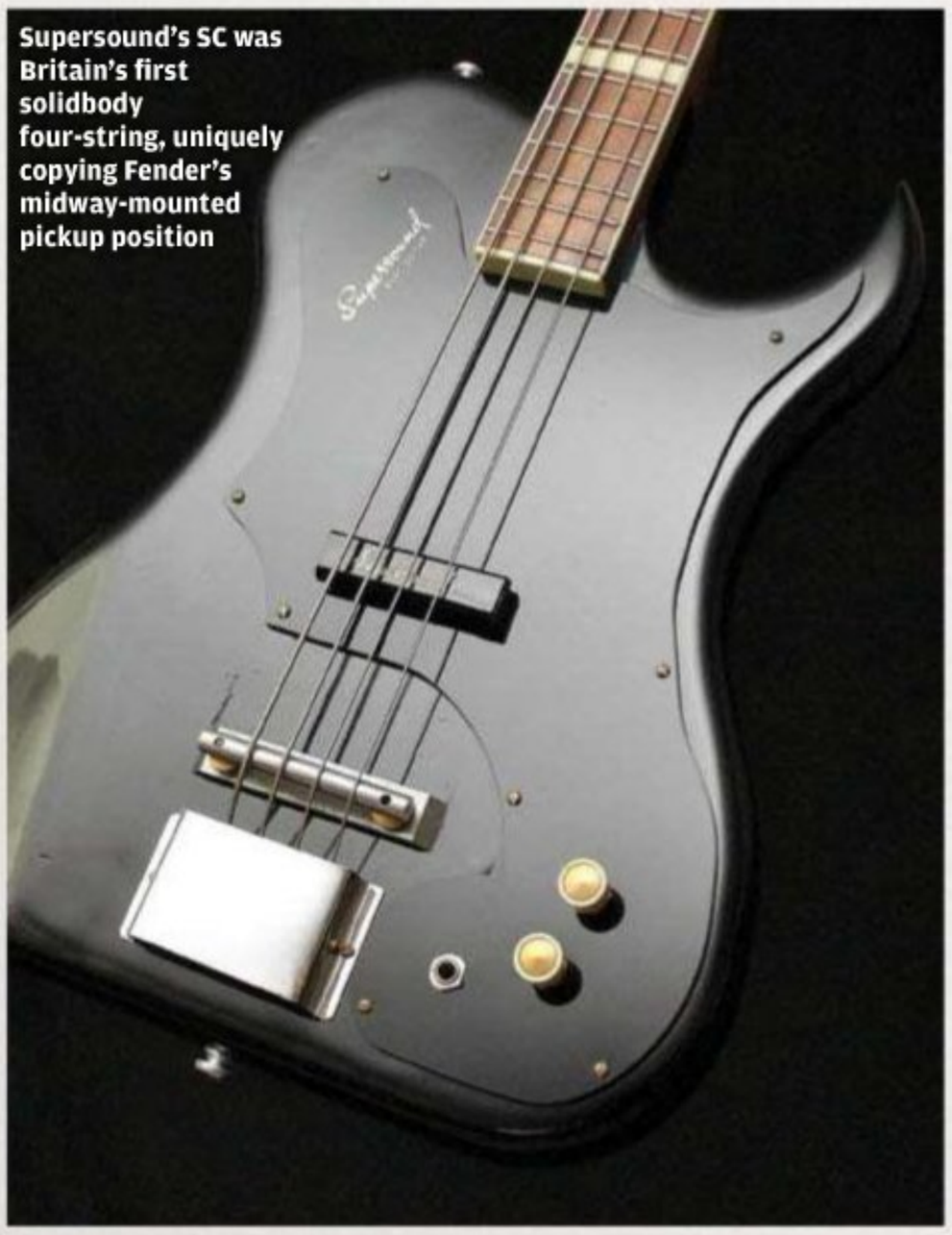


Grimshaw's long-running S.S. Bass featured a short scale neck and two pickups, which have been replaced here

Tuxedo

1958's pine-bodied Supersound Short Scale Standard employed own-made single coils and very basic hardware

to rock in 1958 was to slap some sort of simple pickup onto an existing acoustic, while more moneyed players went instead for ready-made electric-acoustics. Despite the latter being mostly associated with dance band strummers and staid old jazzers, they offered the only real option, because solidbody six-strings were conspicuous by their virtual absence in this country. Led by Leo Fender, US makers had been mass-producing such guitars since the start of the 50s, but these innovative instruments were almost unknown and unseen on this side of the Atlantic, as Britain's post-war import embargo on American-made products was still firmly in force. UK distributors therefore had to



Supersound's SC was Britain's first solidbody four-string, uniquely copying Fender's midway-mounted pickup position

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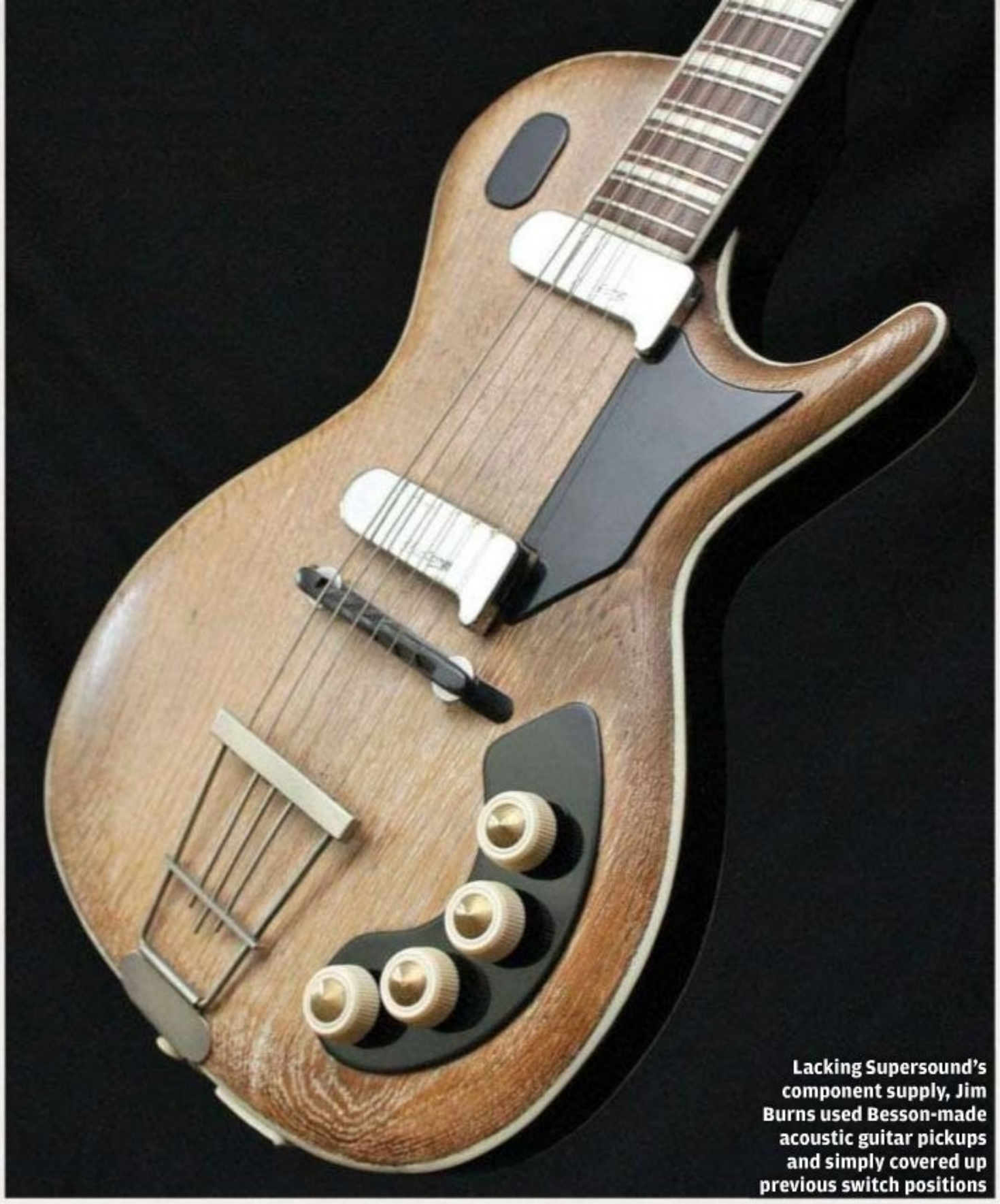

Lacking Supersound's component supply, Jim Burns used Besson-made acoustic guitar pickups and simply covered up previous switch positions

look elsewhere for readily available, more-affordable equivalents, and by late 1958 solid six-strings had begun arriving from Germany, Czechoslovakia and Japan. Most were comparatively cheap and many weren't too cheerful, but at least they looked and sounded more like the 'real thing'.

For those players who still preferred their electrics with air inside, British opposition to the likes of Hofner and Framus came from Abbott-Victor and long-established maker Grimshaw. The latter's stylish S.S. Deluxe debuted in 1957, and soon assumed almost iconic status in the hands of young, rock-orientated performers such as Tony Sheridan, Joe Brown and Bruce Welch.

By late 1958 solid six-strings had begun arriving from Germany, Czechoslovakia and Japan

When other UK companies subsequently entered the electric arena, they opted for non-hollow construction, as it was easier and cheaper, but the Britain of 1958 lagged way behind in the solid stakes and the primitive original examples made here were decidedly distant cousins of their already well-established American relatives.

Jim Burns had built a very basic solidbody guitar in 1952, but six years later his improved efforts attracted the attention of British amplifier company Supersound, who employed him to help design and construct the UK's first commercially made solid electrics. The limited line included the Short Scale Standard and the more curvy Ike Isaacs Short-Scale model, the latter being endorsed by this well-respected British guitarist and intended as a serious, professional six-string. Priced accordingly at £66, it was initially advertised in December 1958, but by then Supersound had already given Burns the bullet and terminated Isaacs' association, while the company's pioneering instrument production was temporarily suspended.

In terms of scope, it was an even sparser story on the four-string front. Grimshaw's S.S. model was the only UK-made bass guitar available to compete with similar acoustic-electrics from Framus and Hofner, but the Supersound/Burns association again proved to be ahead of the game by building Britain's first solid bass in 1958.

1959 – progress and price drops

Jim Burns continued to construct the Ike Isaacs solid under his own steam during early 1959. However, lacking Supersound's supply of suitable components, he had to adapt acoustic guitar pickups and parts, before soon finding a fresh electronics ally in the form of another amp maker, Henry Weill.

To confirm the partnership, subsequent examples duly boasted the Burns-Weill badge, but by mid-59 this logo was adorning some new solids. The Fenton closely aped the outline and diminutive dimensions of the best-selling, Japanese-made, Guyatone/Antoria six-strings, first seen here in late '58, while the more pro-orientated RP Streamline and Super Streamline models (named after session player Roy

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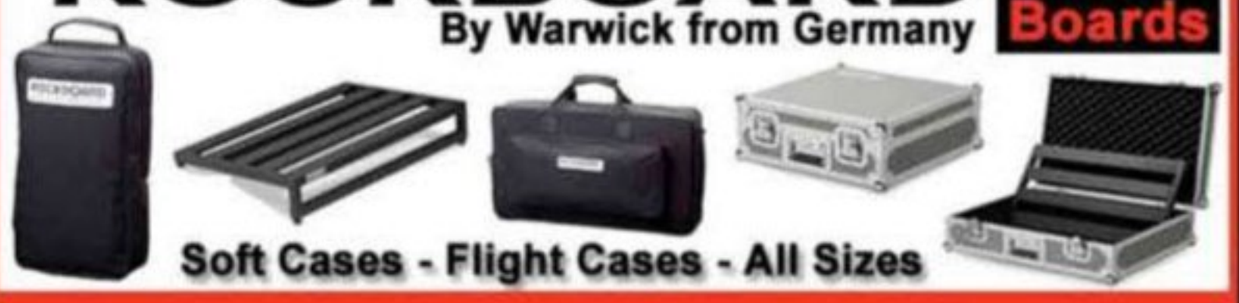

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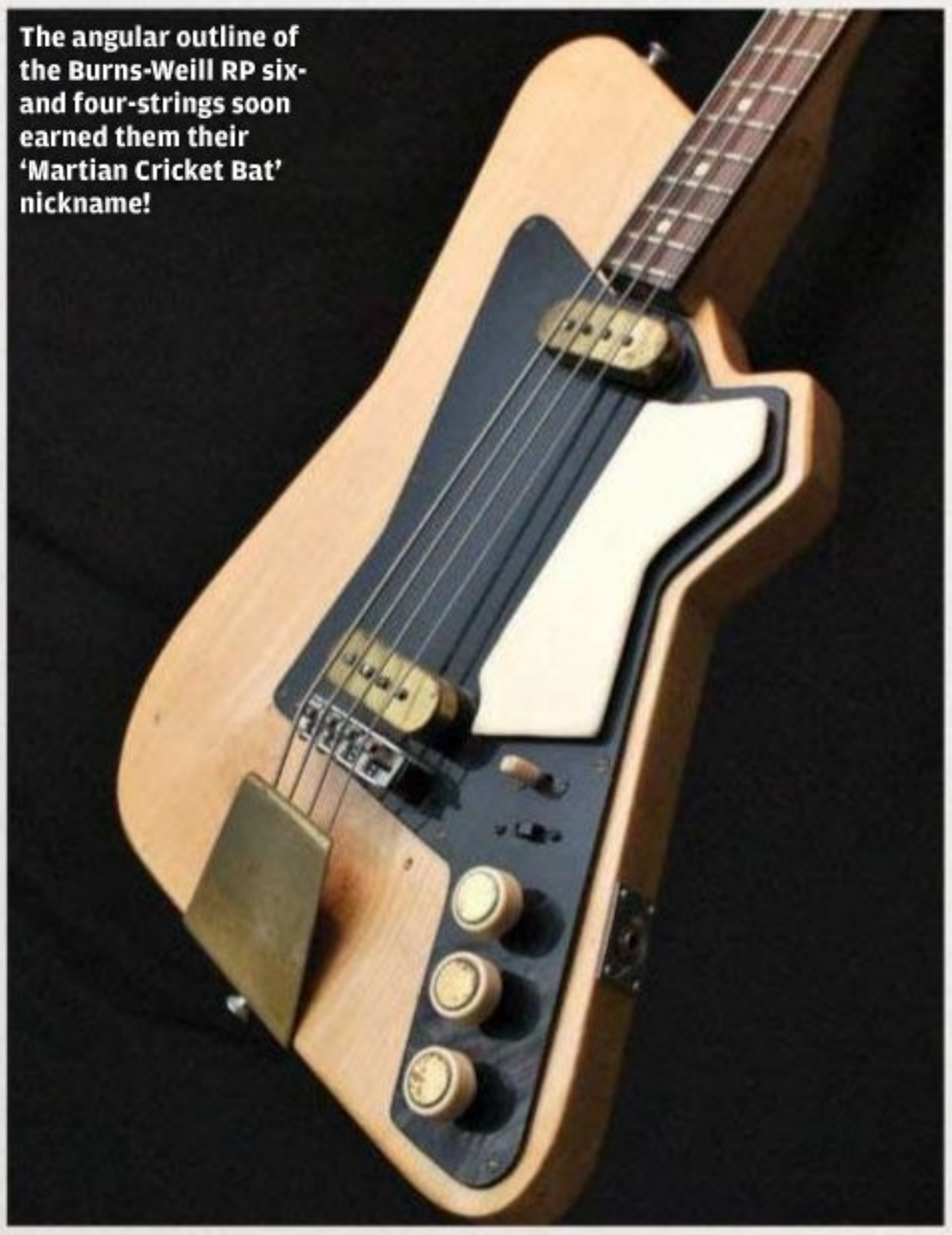
The Burns-Weill Fenton bass featured the Guyatone/Antoria-inspired, single sloping cutaway shape of its six-string stablemate

Plummer) employed very distinctive angular styling. These designs were repeated in four-string form, significantly increasing the choice of solid basses and proving quite popular with players in the process.

The British Government officially lifted the ban on US imports in June 1959, paving the way for American electrics to finally start reaching these shores. Although their arrival was obviously welcome, they weren't plentiful and certainly didn't come cheap, so most players still had to be content with less-expensive alternatives, and more UK companies accordingly became keen to oblige. Dallas had launched the Tuxedo six-string



The angular outline of the Burns-Weill RP six- and four-strings soon earned them their 'Martian Cricket Bat' nickname!

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Selling for £26, the short-scale Dallas Tuxedo four-string made bass playing a much more affordable proposition

three months earlier, this being the first British solidbody aimed at the low-budget beginner. It was appropriately basic, with an acoustic guitar pickup simply screwed onto the body front and controls contained in a similarly top-mounted 'tin can', but the £18 asking price guaranteed instant success for this primitive plank.

By August, the Tuxedo had been joined by an equally cost-conscious and similarly well-received twin-pickup partner, while Dallas followed this up in November with the Tuxedo bass. The latter finally brought the four-string format to a much more affordable level – and it accordingly enjoyed even greater sales.

October 1959 saw another amp maker, Jennings, get in on the electric guitar act via the first Vox solids, although the earliest examples were actually genuine, Japanese-built Guyatones, suitably re-branded by fitting new scratchplates. These were soon superseded by similarly styled, all-UK origin equivalents, but prices stayed low because, like Dallas, Vox quickly realised the commercial value in catering for the entry-level end of the market.

Although remaining firmly in favour of acoustic-electric traditions, Grimshaw succumbed to a stab at the still embryonic solidbody guitar sector with the two-pickup Meteor S.S., launched late in 1959. In contrast to this company's longevity, the Burns-Weill brand proved to be shortlived, because by the end of the year Jim had already decided to part company with Henry – and instead establish his own Ormston Burns operation.

The fledgling firm's first advert appeared in December 1959, extolling the attributes of the all-new Short Scale De-Luxe Artistes model.

This adventurous six-string ably provided a preview of what the next decade would bring for Burns, and the growing number of other English electric guitar makers.

Read the next instalment of this feature in the September issue of Guitar & Bass, on sale 7 August. Instruments kindly supplied by Guy Mackenzie, www.theguitarcollection.org.uk

The earliest in front, illustrating the evolution of the single-pickup Dallas Tuxedo

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MADE IN EUROPE

The trade embargo after World War Two left American guitars unobtainable in the UK. **SID BISHOP** looks back fondly at the European alternatives from the 50s and 60s

SID BISHOP

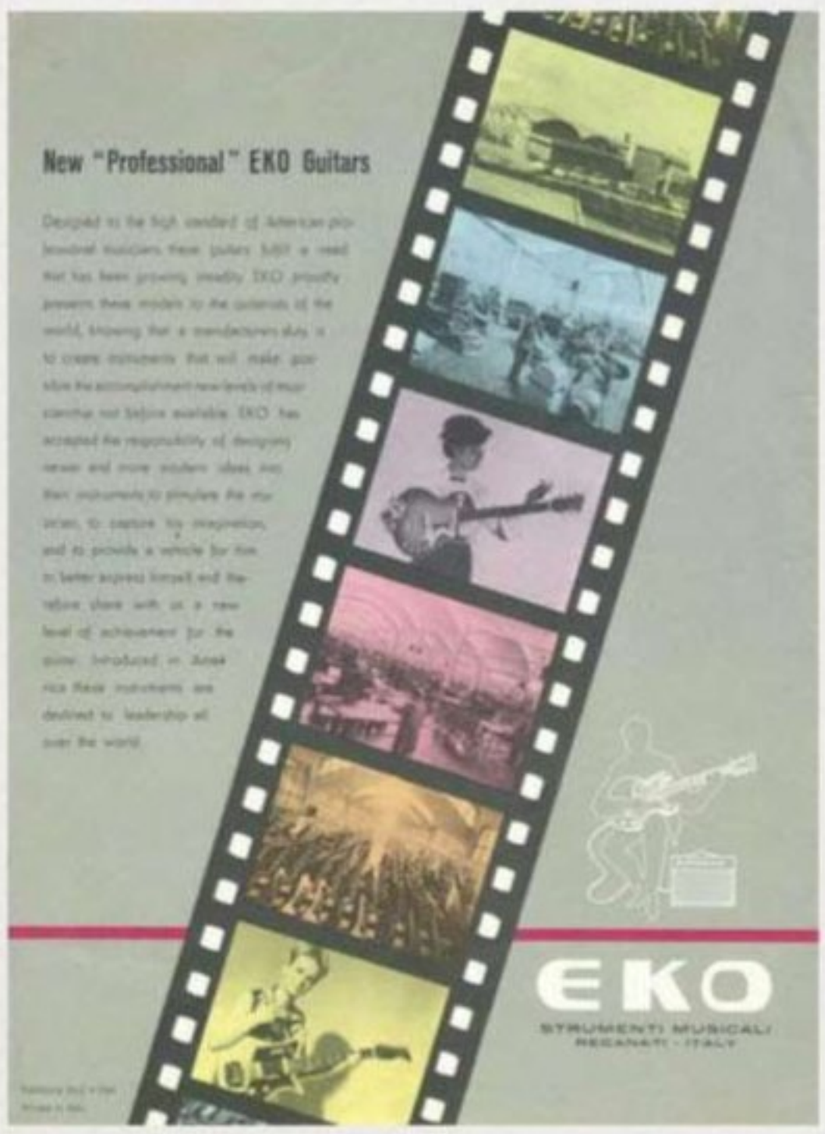
During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

We players and collectors habitually overlook guitars made in Europe, and have turned up our noses at them for decades. For very many years, the most sought-after instruments have been the legendary American classics, and with good reason. Even at their best, European guitars struggle to equal their American cousins, in terms of performance or quality of manufacture – though over the years there have been a few exceptions that came pretty damn close.

In spite of that, I have noted increasing interest in such instruments, and this demand is being driven by a couple of factors. The first is price. It is quite feasible to surround yourself with an enviable collection of genuine vintage guitars, but without having to pay the eye-watering prices that American examples will demand. A 50s Höfner Senator is a fairly desirable guitar in its own right, but will fetch a fraction of the price of a broadly similar Gibson ES-125 or a Guild Capri of roughly the same vintage, and with a good setup will do pretty much the same job.

"In general, and when compared to American imports, European guitars were cheap"

The second factor is nostalgia. When I was a young lad, American-made instruments were unavailable in the UK due to the post-war trade embargo, not lifted until 1959. Even after that date, such beauties were far beyond the reach of our meagre pockets, and for most remained the stuff of dreams. Our desire for a guitar, however, continued unabated, and as virtually anything even vaguely guitar-shaped would have filled that yawning void in our lives, what else did we have to drool over? We could choose from instruments bearing the names of Eko, Höfner, Framus, Hopf, Futurama, Hohner, Hoyer, Landola, Levin, Hagström, Egmond and Rossetti – amongst others – emanating from various countries across Europe, principally Germany, Sweden and Italy. Early Vox guitars were made in the UK, but through the late 60s and early 70s most were made by Eko in Italy, prior to Vox's decision to move all guitar



production to the Far East. There were other British-made guitars, too – see our feature on p96 for an in-depth look at these.

I can remember visiting my local guitar shop and being totally thrilled by the sight of a bright red Rosetti Airstream 3 (made in Holland). I had to have it! It was just so red! I don't think I ever owned one, but to this day if I chance across one at a guitar show I am transported instantly back to the early 60s. I get the same warm fuzzy feeling if I spot one of those Futurama three-pickup solids (made in Czechoslovakia, though later models were made by Hagström), and I can vividly recall clawing away at a pale blue one with those three thumping great rocker switches. They were, of course, awful guitars, but I was an awful guitar player, so they were all I deserved. That's where the nostalgia factor comes in – as if you didn't have one then, it would be nice to have one now, just to hang on the spare bedroom wall to remind you of days long past.

Nostalgia is a strong motivator in the guitar market, and it's pushing up prices. In general, and certainly when compared to the American imports, European guitars were cheap. When the invasion of even cheaper Japanese guitars, such as Teiscos and Guyatones, started arriving in the UK in the late 60s – and in still greater quantities throughout the 70s – European makers were unable to compete, and many could not survive. Those that did contracted their operations and managed to hold on – barely. Some went out of business, although many have since been revived.

Japanese manufacturers had a different approach. They mostly made copies of desirable American originals that players really wanted, making Höfners, Hagströms and the like look dated and frumpy. To nobody's great surprise, they cleaned up in the mass-market sector of the retail music business; and to some extent, this is the situation that still exists today – although it's now the Chinese, and not the Japanese, who are coming up with the cheap stuff.

We are presented, therefore, with a couple of questions. When it comes to European guitars, what is desirable? And, secondly, which guitars are collectable, particularly from an investment standpoint? Desirability is subjective, and is certain to depend on our individual nostalgia memory banks. If you like what you see, and it calls out to you, then buy it! We can use a more logical approach when answering the second question. One thing the European makers were historically very good at was the manufacture of jazz-style archtop acoustics, and virtually any of these, if in playable condition, would be a good buy in my view. Look out for Höfner Congress and Committee models, and the more lavish Senators. I'm confident you can pick any of those up for a few hundred quid and have a nice instrument to play. Sweden's Levin also made some very fine archtops and these, although now rare, would also be a sensible purchase. Levin also made the Goliath flat-top, a fine acoustic by any standard – as, incidentally, are the Finnish-made Landolas.

Eko Ranger acoustics, and especially the 12-strings, were churned out by the thousands in the 60s and are as tough as old boots. They're not the prettiest guitars in the world, but they've survived and can go for (relatively) good prices.

Framus Jan Akkerman models were made in only small numbers and are now sought after. Hagström Vikings are nice guitars, too, remaining in production to this day. I've also noted a few Höfner Galaxies at guitar shows in recent months – handsome instruments – and these will range in price from a sensible £300 to £400, up to the two or three times as much demanded by some optimists.

The one instrument that does leap out at me, though, is the Hofner Violin Bass, for obvious reasons. Original 50s examples will fetch very good prices, and although not in continuous production in the years since, are again available. As you might expect, there is an expensive German version, and as is common nowadays, a cheaper Chinese model.

There is a steady market for European guitars, and although they will never be worth fortunes, they're certainly interesting and collectable.

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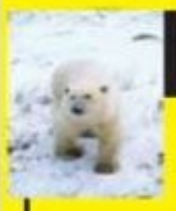

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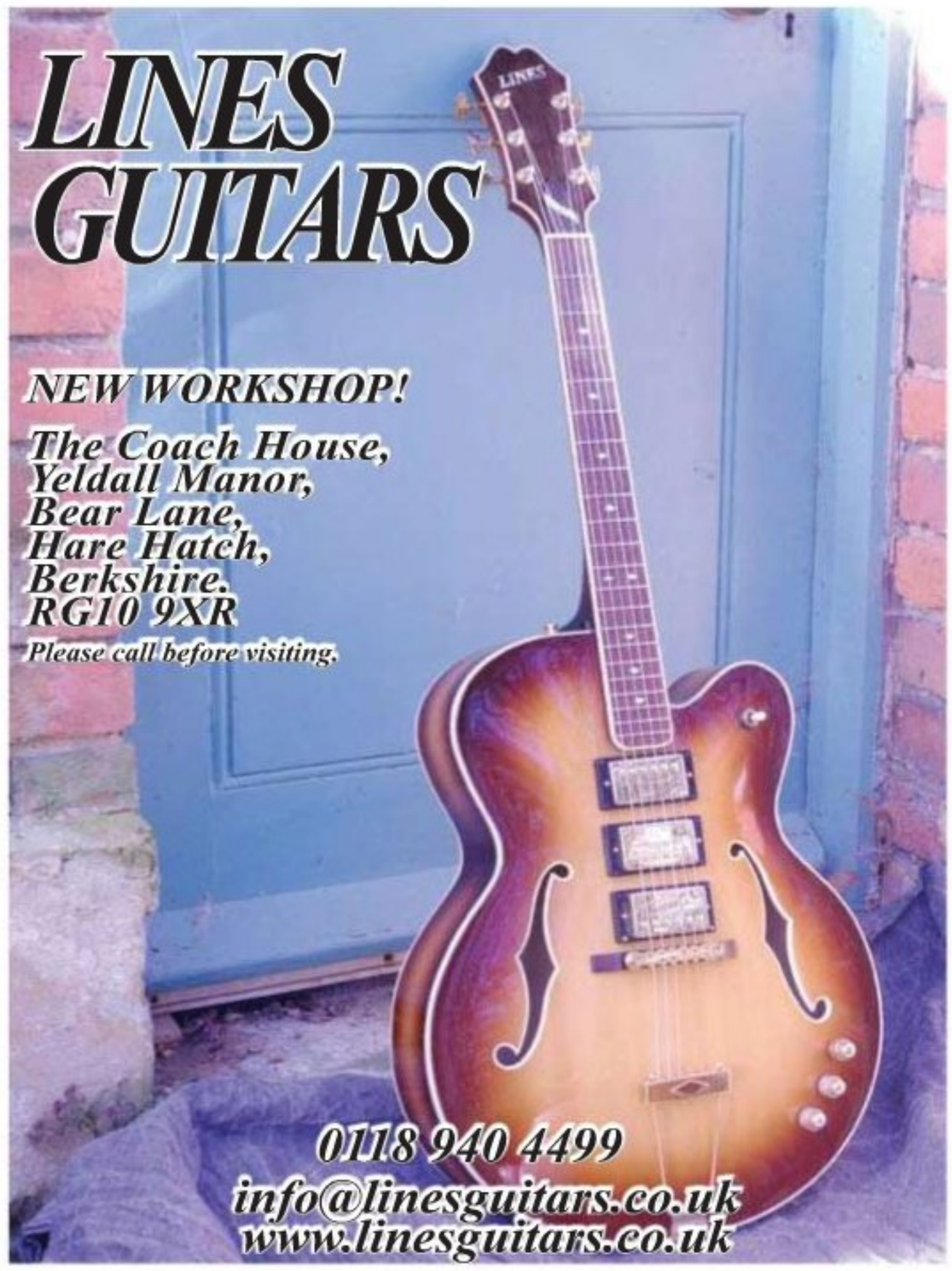

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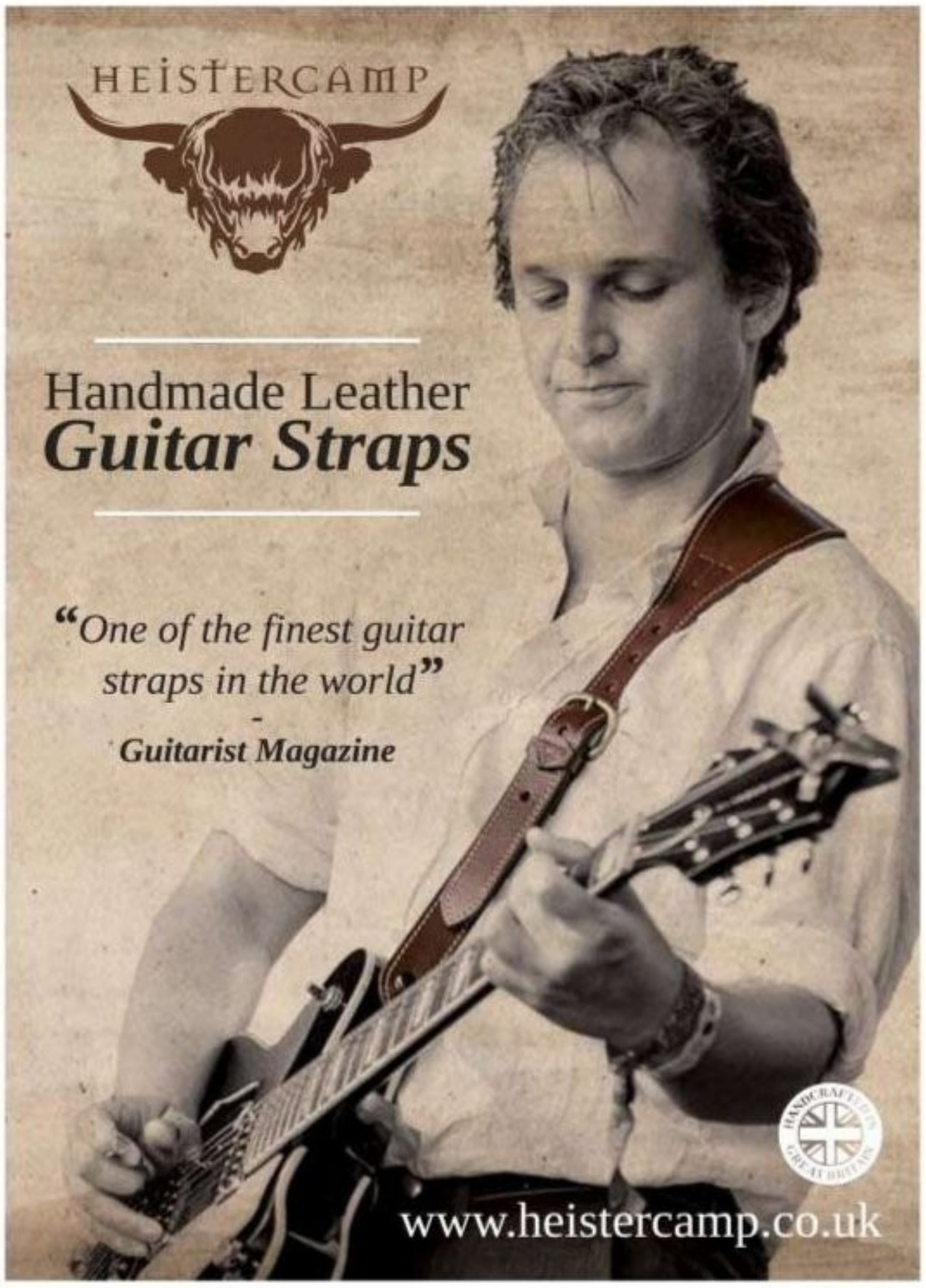

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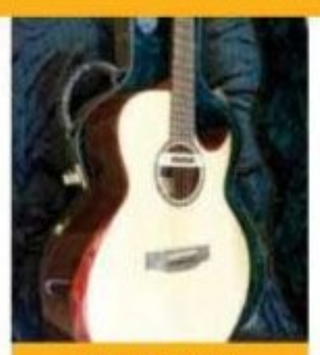

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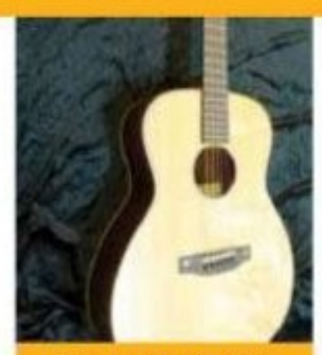

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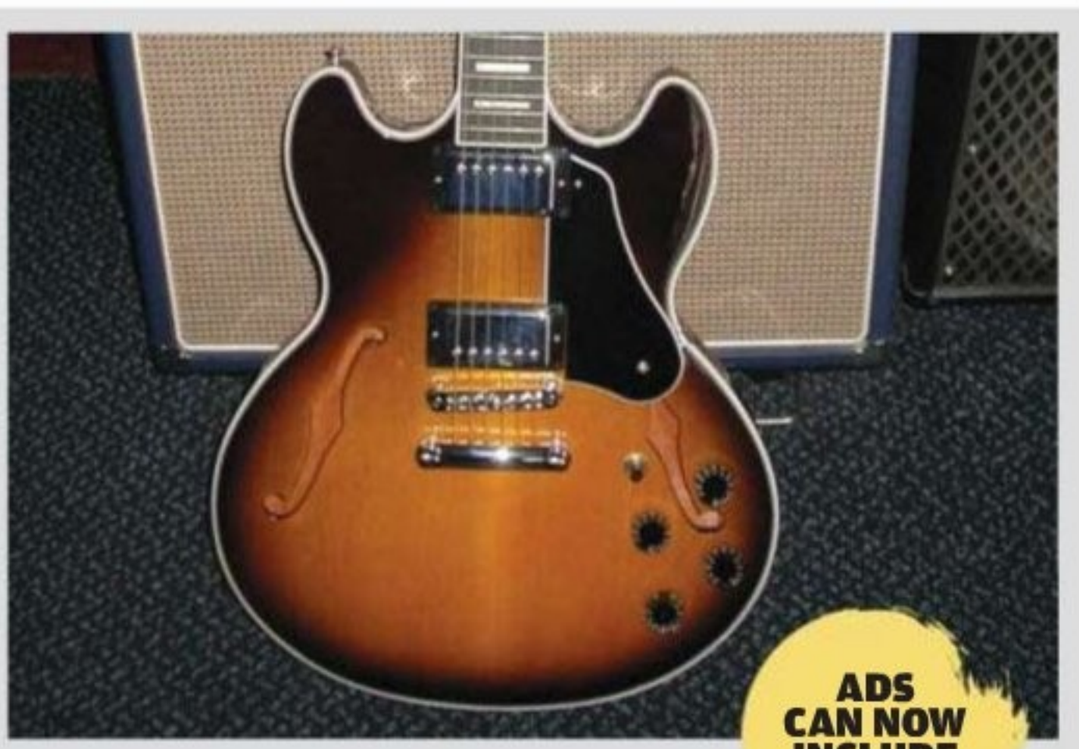

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All about... reverb

Since the birth of the electric guitar, players have sought to go beyond natural ambience and room acoustics. Reverb gives us that ability. **ANDY PRICE** plates up the info...

Ever since the inception of recorded music, sound recordists have attempted to incorporate natural ambience into their work to give the impression of space, distance and natural echo. Reverb is highly dependant on the type of room and the physical structure of the environment you're playing in – as well as the speed at which the echoes of the sound return to your ears, and from what direction. Many musicians often talk about 'echo' and 'reverb' as if they're discussing the same concept; they're not. Reverb (although obviously dependant on echo) takes place when a reflected sound wave gives the illusion of enhancing notes by coming back to your ears in less than 0.1 seconds. This creates a natural mix effect in the ears of the listener and enables them to imagine the space the sound is being played in.

Early experiments with capturing natural room sound required music producers to take their vinyl acetates to reverberant rooms, play their recordings back on a centrally positioned loudspeaker and then re-record the resulting sound. But what about musicians who wanted to take the sonic characteristics of a particular room and reproduce that same sound live?

Many musicians talk about 'echo' and 'reverb' as if they're discussing the same concept; they're not

Springing into action

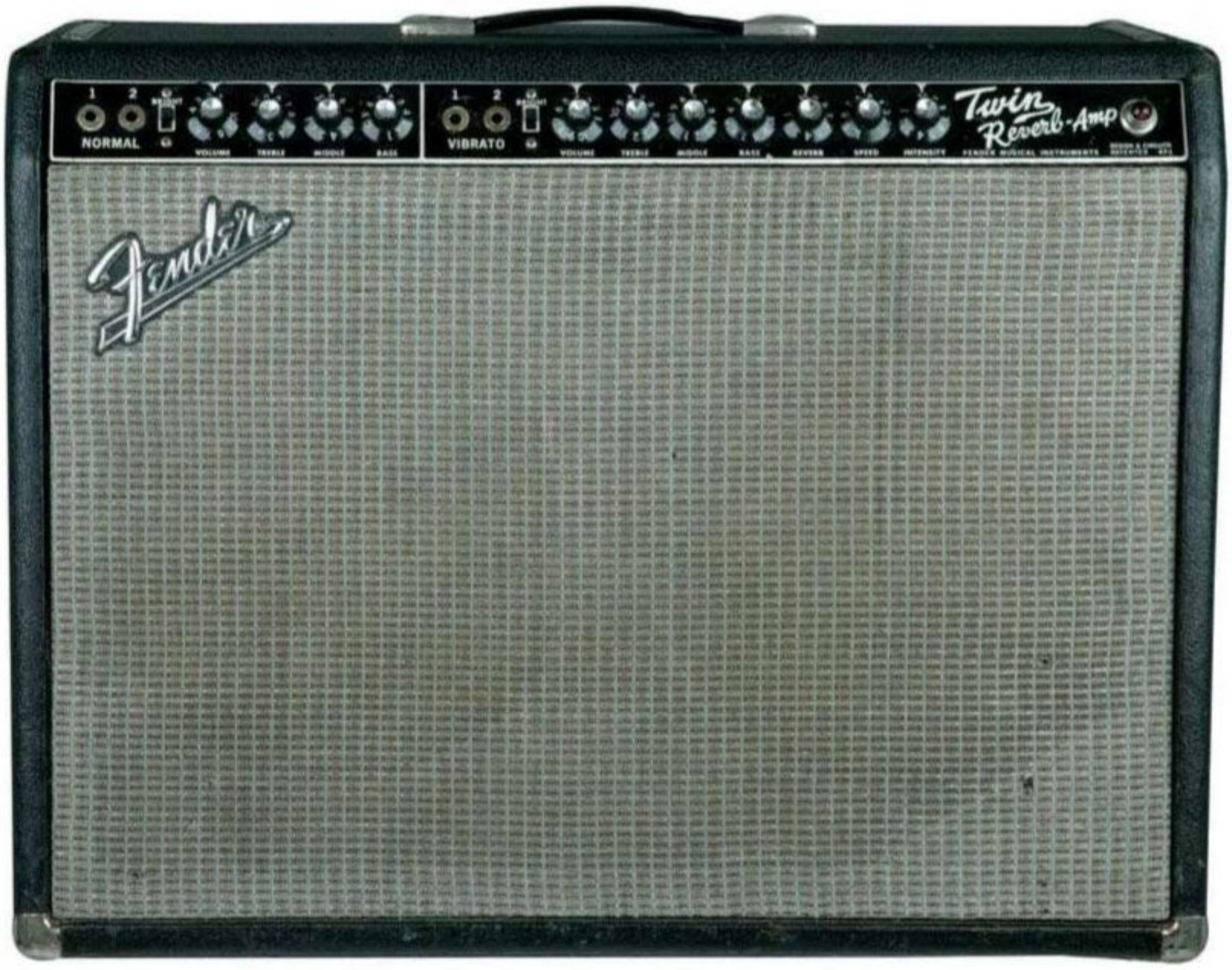
The first purpose-built artificial reverb effect pre-dates the genesis of the electric guitar and was created by Laurens Hammond (he of Hammond organ fame), who was granted a patent in 1939 for a spring-based mechanical reverberation system to enhance the sound of his organs for church environments.

The principle of this system still remains widely used (along with plate reverb). Essentially, the sound is reflected back and forth through large metal springs that are strung between two coils, and variables such as decay and delay are alterable by physically widening the spring's diameter and length. The original spring reverb tanks were gigantic and fairly unfeasible for travelling musicians; in common with several other amplifier manufacturers, Leo Fender adopted this artificial reverb technology for guitarists by adding a spring reverb unit to the catalogue, alongside his Brownface amplifiers, in 1961.

The classic Fender 6G15 Spring Reverb resembles a small amplifier head, and has three simple controls: dwell, mix and tone. Regarded by many as the holy grail of old-school spring reverb, the sound of these classic heads would become a staple of numerous emergent genres – most prominently in the sound of surf-rock and mainstream American pop of the time via artists such as Dick Dale, The Ventures and The Beach Boys.

Also in 1961, the Summer NAMM show in July saw the launch of Ampeg's Reverberocket R-12R – most likely the first electric guitar amplifier with onboard reverb, even if it beat the competition to it by only a matter of months. Ampeg labelled its onboard reverb control 'echo' for most of the sixties, and echo was already a familiar concept to many guitarists, thanks to its prevalence in 1950s rock 'n' roll and rockabilly: Scotty Moore's Ray Butts EchoSonic amp had a tape echo built into it, and he used this on many of the early Elvis sessions that would help define the sound of rock 'n' roll.

Fender's next major reverb innovation would follow in February 1963 with the launch of the Vibroverb, its first combo to include the onboard reverb circuit that would become synonymous with the Fender sound, following the arrival of blackface cosmetics later that year. Early Vibroverbs are highly sought-after, given their very low initial production run and later use by the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan.



Popular music and guitar technology evolved symbiotically throughout the sixties and seventies, and transistor-based stompboxes would eventually make it easier to replicate a variety of room sounds using a single compact unit.

On a plate...

The principles of plate reverberation are fairly similar to those of spring reverb. However, with plate reverb the audio signal requires the use of an electromechanical transducer, which generates vibrations on a physical plate, resulting in a similar but still distinctly different type of reverb sound. Spring and plate reverbs are man-made, artificial reverbs, but there are several other types of reverb that we should also talk about – hall reverb does pretty much as you'd expect, and simulates the sound of a concert hall. Normally, this consists of a series of initial, quite long, audio reflections followed by spacious decay.

Chamber reverb is similar to that of a hall, but gives the sonic impression of a substantially smaller space, the time of the reverb is significantly shorter, and it's one of the most commonly used throughout recording history. Abbey Road Studios used a physical chamber next to The Beatles' creative hub, Studio Two, to run a lot of their vocal and guitar tracks through.

Room reverb usually has an even shorter length of decay time, replicating hard close surfaces with minimal reflections.

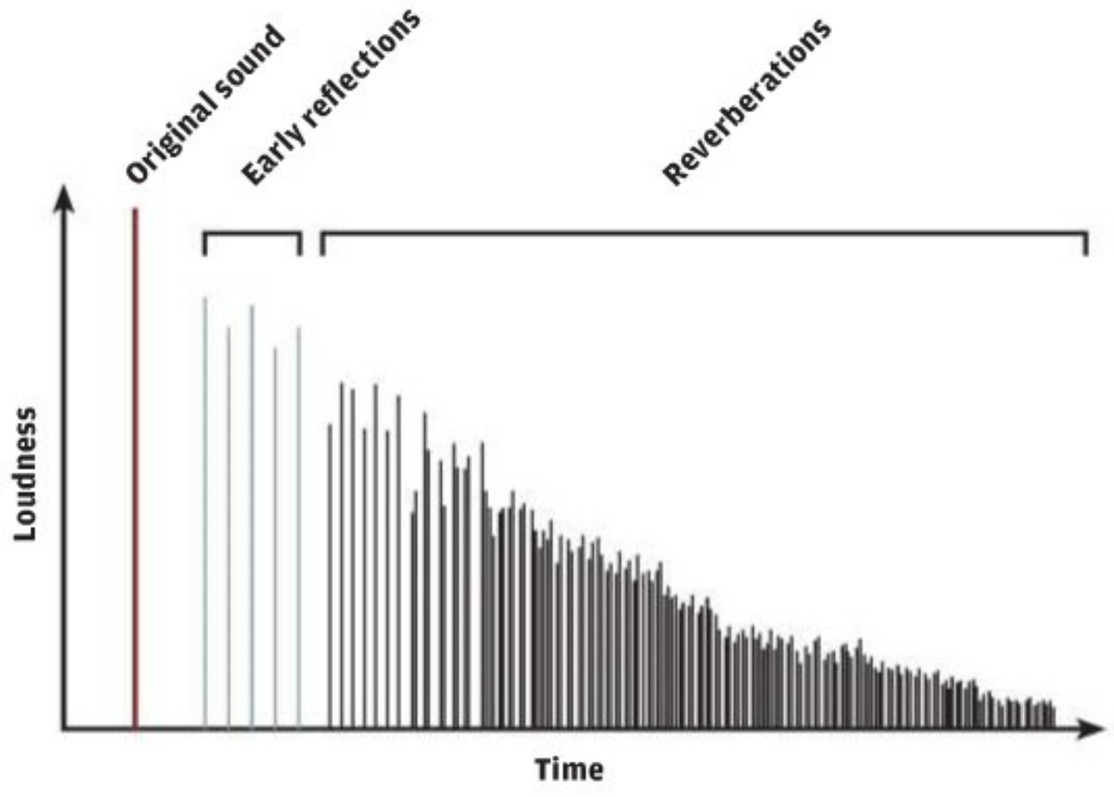
Although these are the core 'common' types of reverb, there are many other types, too – particularity in the digital world. Today, software plug-ins give producers a higher control over scalability, enabling anyone to easily sculpt their own unique reverbs, and even design their own virtual spaces.

Digital days

Recording studios were the first places to use genuine digital reverb. EMT's 250 unit in 1976 used a very different process for creating reverb – processing the audio signal by fading many feedback delay lines to give the sonic illusion of audio bouncing off the walls of a simulated space.

Lexicon further enhanced what digital reverb could do in 1978 with the 224 model, but for a much more affordable price – the brand soon became one of the most highly respected names in the effects industry and a go-to name for quality reverbs, not just for producers but also for stage guitarists. A wide range of much beloved Lexicon reverbs would be released, with Lexicon tech incorporated into later units such as the Digitech RV-7.

Decades later, the use of reverb on both recorded and live guitar sounds is as popular as ever, and it's never been easier to implement. We guitarists are now able to jack our guitars into our telephones and (through apps such as IK Multimedia's AmpliTube and TC's TonePrint) instantly simulate any type of acoustic space, from the tiniest closet to the Grand Canyon! Imagine what early innovators such as Laurens Hammond would think of that...



BUYER'S GUIDE

If you're looking to splash some atmospherics across your playing, from vintage surf sounds to vast swells, here's our pick of four of the best options at various price points to ensure you've got reverb covered...

ELECTRO-HARMONIX HOLY GRAIL NANO £79

EHX always adds a little extra to its pedals, so as well as classic hall and spring reverb emulations, the pedalboard-friendly Holy Grail Nano includes the love-it-or-hate-it Flerb flanged reverb. The newer Holy Grail Neo (£89) dispenses with Flerb in favour of a more useful plate sound.

TC ELECTRONIC HALL OF FAME MINI £60

Are you short on pedalboard space but looking for a no-nonsense, versatile reverb pedal? TC's HOF Mini might look limited, but thanks to the company's TonePrint technology you can beam a vast array of reverb sounds into the pedal; and though it stores only one at a time, many players will find that sufficient for live use. The TonePrint Editor software enables you to design your own reverb, too.

STRYMON BIGSKY £429

OK, so the price might make you wince, but for the more creatively-minded guitarist, there's a world of inspiration in this fully-featured blue box, from retro spring emulation right up to massive swells and psychedelic reverse reverb textures. Post-rockers, prog-rockers and shoegazers alike will find this to be an indispensible creative tool.

FENDER '63 TUBE REVERB £863

Fender's iconic 6G15 tube reverb unit is back and available in classic brownface or lacquered tweed livery. It's unwieldy and far from cheap, but placed in front of a Fender-voiced 6V6 or 6L6 valve amp this is the sound of vintage surf. For a convincing digital emulation in stompbox form, try Catalinbread's Topanga (£159), which wowed us last month, scoring 9/10.

TUITION

Clean Sweeping

Build on last month's lesson and take your sweep picking techniques to the next level by tackling this trio of arpeggio patterns, which introduce the minor7♭5 chord...

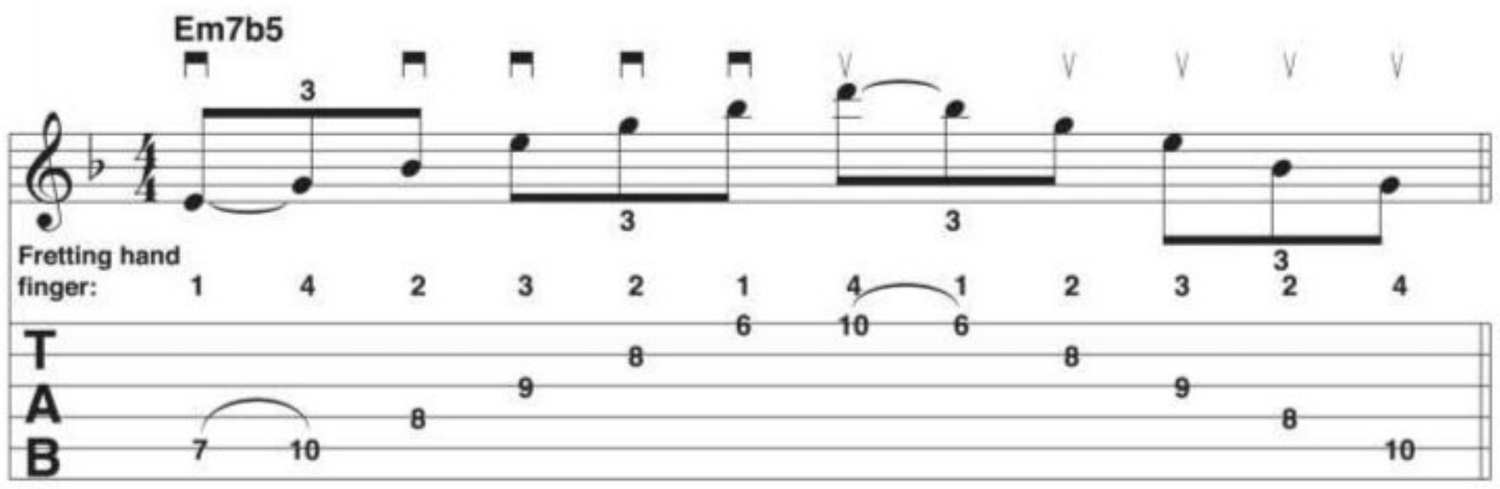
This month's exercises will broaden your repertoire of sweep-picked arpeggios. Last month, we learnt sweep arpeggio patterns for two-octave major, seventh and minor chords with the root on the fifth string; this month, we're going to learn sweep arpeggio patterns for the min7♭5 chord, the first-inversion major chord and the second-inversion major chord – for reasons that will become apparent as you work through the exercises. Once again, it's important to practise slowly and accurately, making sure only one note sounds at a time. Start practising at around crotchet = 60 and ultimately aim for crotchet = 200.

1 *Em7♭5 arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

This 'm7♭5' may seem a trifle obscure, but students of theory will recognise this as the chord built on the seventh degree of the major scale. Like last month, this one begins with a hammer-on. There's no rolling of the fretting-hand fingers, but you need to move the second finger accurately between the fourth and second strings.

Now, using the major arpeggio pattern and the minor arpeggio pattern from Ex. 3 last month, you can play an 'arpeggio scale' in the major key by starting each arpeggio at the appropriate fret. All the arpeggios from last month and this month take their name from the note on the fifth string. So, in the key of C the pattern of arpeggios would be C (Ex. 1 from last month, fifth string, third fret), Dm (Ex. 3 from last month, starting on the fifth string, fifth fret), Em (Ex. 3 from last month, starting on the fifth string, seventh fret), F (Ex. 1 from last month, starting on the fifth string, eighth fret), G7 (Ex. 2 from last month, fifth string, 10th fret), Am (Ex. 3 from last month, fifth string, 12th fret), Bm7♭5 (this exercise's arpeggio, starting on the fifth string, 14th fret) and C (Ex. 1 from last month, starting on the fifth string, 15th fret).

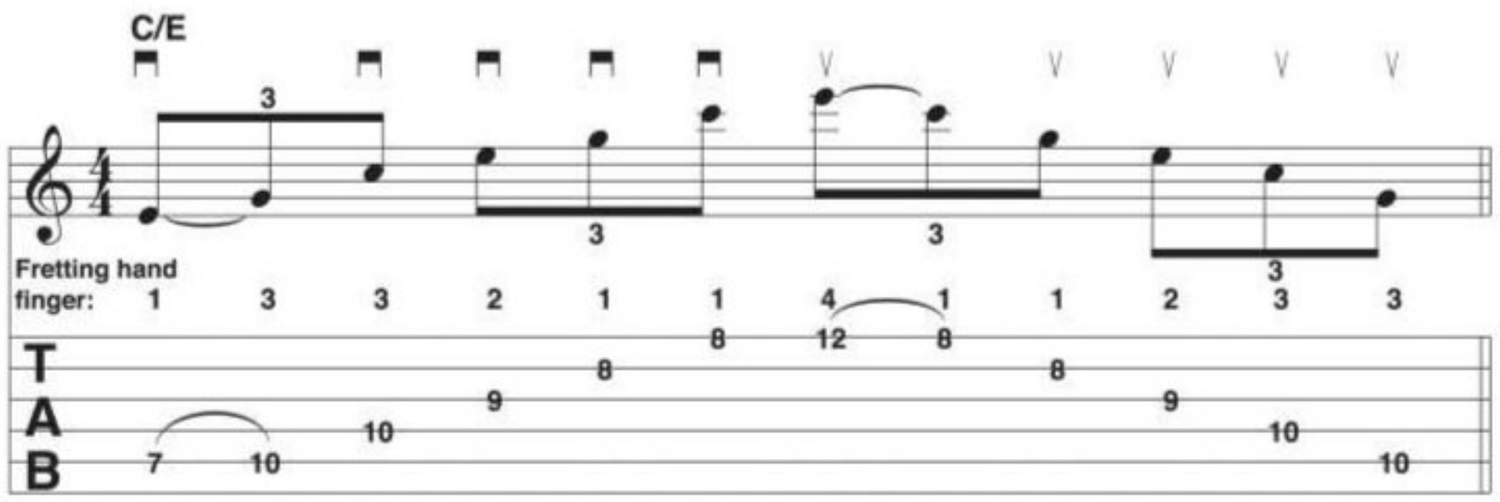


2 *C/E arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

The chord progressions for suggested sweep picking arpeggio practice at the end of last month's lesson involved some considerable leaps for the fretting hand. One way to avoid jumping all over the fretboard is to introduce inversions – that is, an arpeggio in which the lowest note is not the root of the chord. This C/E arpeggio is a first inversion – it has the major third of the C arpeggio at the bottom of the chord. Again, this arpeggio starts with a hammer-on then involves rolling with both the third and first fingers.

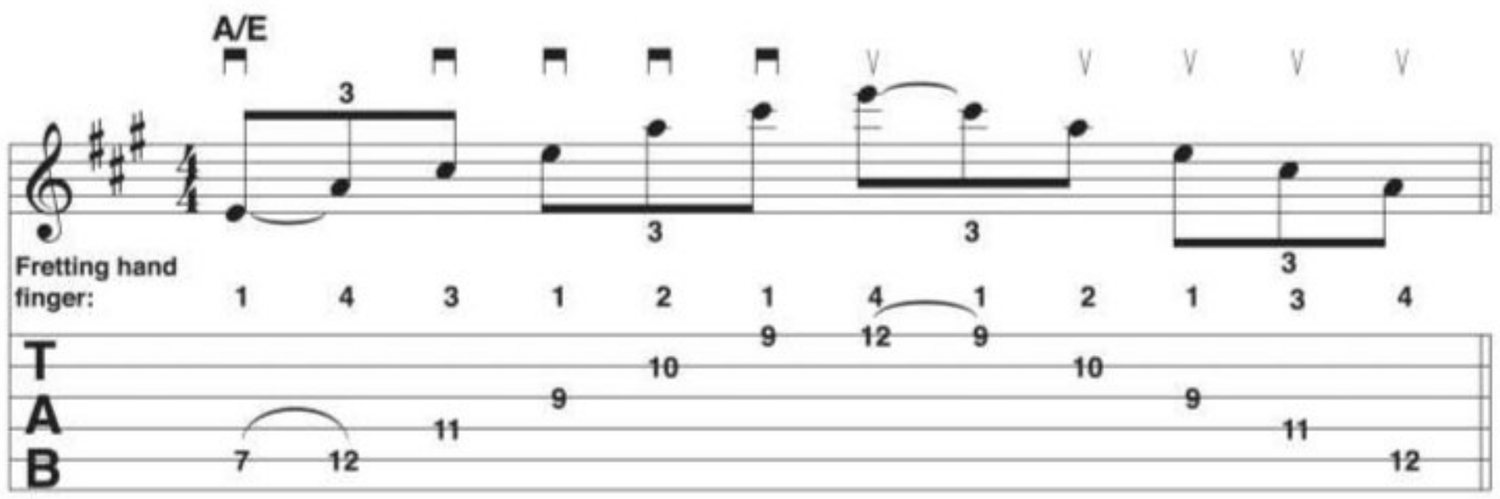
Once you've got this under your fingers, practise changing from a sweep-picked E arpeggio (Ex. 1 from last month) to this C/E arpeggio – the two arpeggios share the same lowest note.



3 *A/E arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

This is a second-inversion A arpeggio with the fifth at the bottom. Yet again, it begins with a hammer-on, this one being a bit of a stretch. There's no rolling for the fretting hand, but the first finger has to move quickly between the third and first strings. Once this is under the fingers, outline an E to A/E progression using the sweep arpeggios already learnt – the two arpeggios share the same lowest note. Then play through a E, C/E, A/E, E progression.



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How to... record acoustics

Capturing the essence of the humble acoustic guitar can be a tricky task, but our bluffer's guide will make a record producer out of you in no time...

Life would be a lot simpler if there was one perfect method of recording acoustic guitar that everybody agreed with. However, if you ask 10 engineers to name their favourite technique you'll likely get 10 completely different answers. Some engineers only ever use a single microphone to capture the sound, while others prefer to blend the sound of two or more mics.

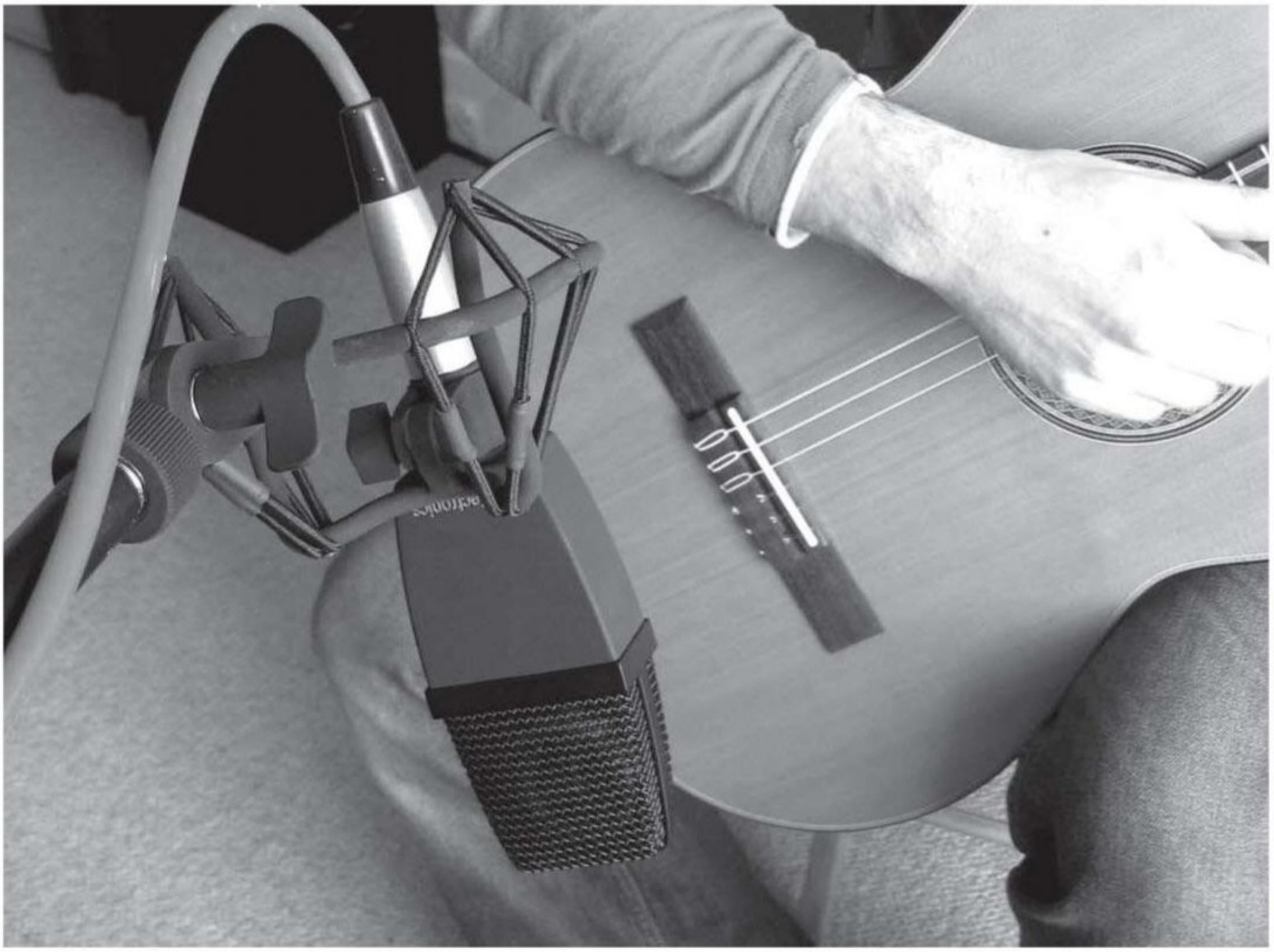
The best engineers understand the benefits and pitfalls of a number of techniques and adapt their mic'ing approach to suit the job in hand. In this tutorial, we'll look at how to get set up along with tips on how to produce great results from using one microphone to capture the whole sound.

Tools for the job

Acoustic guitars come in a wide range of flavours, ranging from the warm, mellow tones of nylon-strung classical and Spanish guitars to the bright, metallic sound of resonator types, such as Dobros; the full-bodied folksy vibe of a dreadnought to the distinctive sprightly tone of a gypsy jazz guitar. And then, of course, there are 12-strings... Thankfully, no matter what style of acoustic guitar is used, the methods employed to record it remain the same. Of course, you won't be able to make a classical guitar sound like a resonator with recording techniques, so it's very important to make sure that you choose the right instrument for the job in the first place.

Prior to the session, it's worth checking that the guitar is in the best possible condition. The age of the strings will affect the tone, and be aware that the gauge used will make quite a big contribution to the sound: light-gauge strings will produce a thinner tone than heavy ones. Also, the type of plectrum (if used) will influence the final result: a thinner one providing more percussive energy from the strumming, and a thicker one generating more volume thanks to its heavier attack.

Once the guitar is in optimum condition, listen to how it sounds in the room, as it's the way the instrument interacts with the recording environment that has one of the most profound effects



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on the sound. Unlike vocals, that are best captured with as little room ambience as possible, acoustic guitars positively benefit from the natural reverb of a good recording room. Generally, a reasonably lively room with wooden floors will give the best results. Also, try different rooms, as you may find that the guitar actually sounds best in the kitchen!

Tone on the range

With the guitar sounding great in the recording environment, it's time to think about the best way of capturing the sound. Most engineers choose condenser microphones to record acoustic guitars, as they are often more flattering than dynamic types. Opinions differ as to whether a large or small diaphragm condenser is preferred; however, the sound of the instrument and the role it will play in the final mix should influence the choice to a greater degree. Even with the best EQ and compression, a midrange-y parlour guitar will just not cut it if your track requires a bass-y jumbo-style sound.

Large diaphragms tend to have a fatter, full-bodied sound, which is often desirable if the guitar is a featured instrument, as you would hear in, say, a solo singer/songwriter performance. Small diaphragm mics are usually favoured for their exceptionally detailed top-end response, which is useful to help the guitar cut through a busy mix.

That's not to say that dynamic mics are completely unsuitable, though, as a well-positioned dynamic mic will sound better than an expensive but poorly placed condenser. Ribbon mics (which are a type of dynamic microphone) can sound gorgeous on an acoustic guitar, as they often sound big and warm but still capture the delicacy and detail of the sound. Also, the bi-directional response of ribbons picks up a decent amount of natural room ambience. Now, not all of us have the luxury of choosing any mic that takes our fancy, but as indicated above, an inexpensive and carefully positioned mic should produce satisfying results.

Sound decisions

The most common mistake made by novice engineers is to point the mic straight at the soundhole. Sure, it looks like the right thing to do, but this position often exaggerates any low-end boom, that could clutter up your mix.

It's far better to find a position that picks up a more even balance of the instrument's sound. Remember, an acoustic guitar's sound is made up of several elements: resonances from the soundhole, wooden panels and internal bracing, as well as the sound of the strings, so finding a spot that captures a larger slice of the complete sound is best.

Most engineers choose condenser mics to record acoustic guitars, as they are often more flattering

Aim to find a position that offers a decent overview of the guitar's sound without too much unwanted low-end information, especially when using a directional mic with a fixed cardioid polar pattern. If you have a mic with an omnidirectional pick-up pattern you can afford to move in a little closer if desired, as the low-end boost caused by the proximity effect of directional mics isn't an issue. Also, an omni mic will capture a nice, even amount of room sound.

One problem with this mic position is that with some instruments the sound can lack body, which can be an issue if the guitar is a main part of the recording. If, however, the guitar forms part of a busy mix, the thinner sound can be positively advantageous, particularly if you want the rhythmic strumming of the strings to cut through without too much midrange frequency information cluttering up the production.

Another problem can arise from unwanted noises, either from the player's fingers sliding >

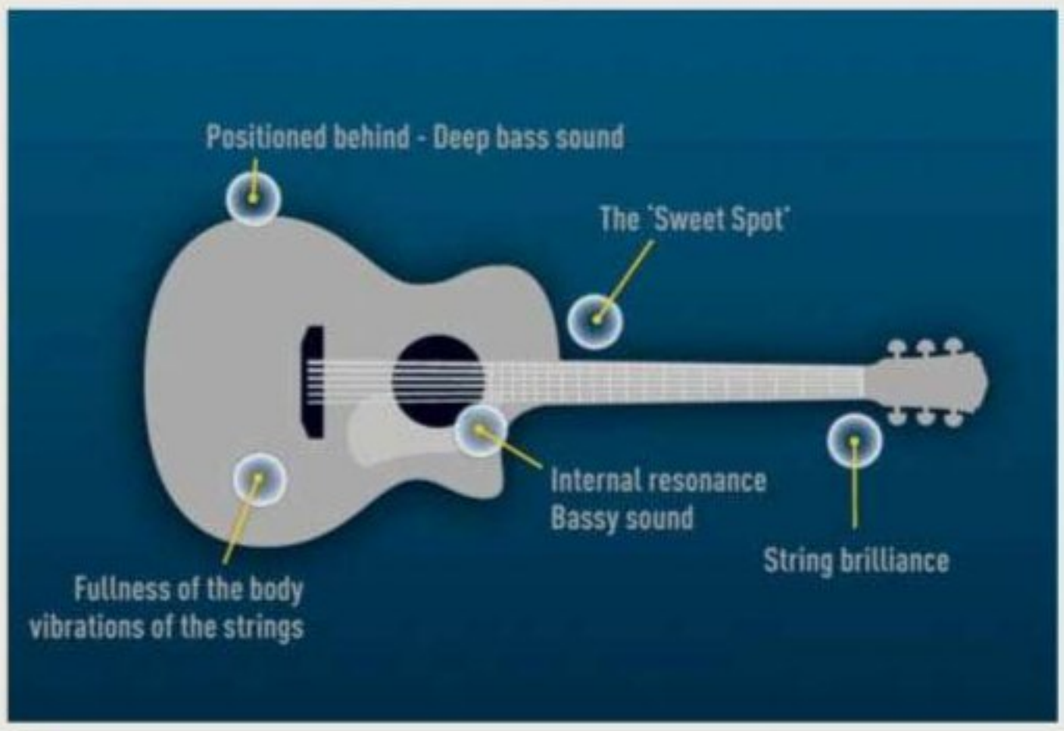
SETTING UP AND SELECTING MICS

1 Different shapes and makes of acoustic guitars can sound dramatically different, so make sure you have one that suits the track. Sort out any rattles and buzzes, and ensure that the player's jewellery or clothing – shirt buttons, for example – are not causing unwanted noise by knocking against the instrument. Discard tired, dull-sounding strings, but be aware that brand-new strings may emphasise 'finger screech'. Coated strings and lubricants can help tame this.

2 Start by making sure the guitar sounds good in the room. If your recording room is small, boxy and dry-sounding, try another room. Alternatively, increase ambience by removing soft furnishings and adding some reflective surfaces. A handy trick in heavily carpeted rooms is to place a sheet of hardboard or something similar beneath the player in order to pick up some reflections from the floor. When all else fails, add some artificial room ambience during processing.

3 Use a condenser mic, if possible, to capture the high-frequency detail and harmonics. Mics with switchable polar patterns are ideal, as omnidirectional or figure of eight (bi-directional) settings offer more natural ambience and avoid the low-end boom often caused by the proximity effect when using a cardioid setting. If you only have cardioid mics, choose the brightest-sounding one and position it at a distance that avoids excessive bass and captures some room ambience.

POSITIONING YOUR MICROPHONE



1 Listen to the sound the guitar produces by moving your head around in front of the instrument (whilst someone else is playing it, obviously!). You will hear the sound change quite significantly from one position to another. The sound should become lighter as you move away from the body and towards the neck of the guitar. Try to find a spot that captures a full, resonant tone without excessive boom, while also picking up the detail of the strings being plucked and strummed.

2 Once you have set up a microphone, put on some headphones with a feed of the signal and sweep the mic around, moving along the guitar at various distances and heights to find the best sound. Make sure the headphone level is sufficient to block-out the ambient sound of the instrument without being deafeningly loud. Better still, if you have someone to assist you, get them to sweep the mic around while you audition the sound on your monitors.

3 As a starting point that is favoured by many engineers, position the microphone at the place where the guitar's neck joins the body. Experiment with distance to achieve a good balance of direct sound and room ambience, and also try some less obvious positions such as placing the mic at the player's shoulder level.

along the strings, or annoying fret buzzes. A good solution to this problem is to position the mic away from the neck and further along the body towards the bridge.

For a more full-bodied tone, experiment with positions that have the microphone placed above the sound-hole, angled downwards – this position is excellent for capturing a well-rounded sound while avoiding the blast of air emanating from the sound-hole.

If the guitar you're recording is an electro-acoustic then you can DI it onto a separate channel (preferably through a preamp first to add warmth) and then blend it in later (if required) to thicken the sound. (Granted, we're meant to be talking about recording with just one mic, but as this is a pickup we can get away with it!).

Multiple mics

Now, it's time to delve deeper and discover how multi-mic'ing can offer a wider variety of tonal options. Don't be fooled, though, it's no good throwing up several randomly placed mics and hoping for the best, you still need to think about and – crucially – listen to the sound of the instrument before deciding where the best sounds will be captured. Points mentioned in Part 1, such as the quality of the recording environment, condition of the instrument and an understanding of whereabouts on the guitar various tones can be captured are still relevant and should be used as a good starting point before extra mics are brought into play. As we shall see, using more than one mic – or a combination of a microphone and a DI can present its own problems as well as offering you more flexibility.

There are two main reasons why we might want to use two or more mics to record acoustic guitar. Firstly, microphones can be placed at wildly different-sounding parts of the guitar to achieve a coherent blend. With just one mic, the chosen position must capture a fairly broad range of the tones that the instrument is capable of. However, using two mics, for example, one could be positioned near the bridge where the sound is full-bodied but might lack top-end detail, and a second mic could be placed facing the neck, capturing a bright, detailed sound that would probably be too thin to be used alone. Secondly, two or more

mics offer the possibility of stereo recording.

When using multi-mic techniques to create a mono signal (which can later be panned anywhere in the stereo picture), there are several ways of going about it to achieve the desired effect. As previously mentioned, mics can be used to pick up contrasting tones that would be practically useless used on their own, but sound great when mixed together. However, another method is to try to get the best overall sound from the first mic – as you would when using single mic techniques – then embellish the sound with a second mic that emphasises certain aspects of the guitar's tone that the first mic is lacking. For example, if your first mic is in the sweet spot (the classic 12th-fret position is often a good starting point) but lacks body, a second mic could be placed where more bottom-heavy tones are heard – near the bridge of the guitar, behind the instrument or even close to the soundhole. Similarly, if the first microphone is missing some high-frequency information, a second mic positioned somewhere further up the fretboard towards the headstock might produce a more natural tone than adding some top-end EQ to the main microphone.

Another reason for using more than one mic is to capture some of the recording room's natural reverb. Again, the main mic should capture a good overall guitar sound while another mic, placed at a distance, will add ambience and life. Of course, the techniques already mentioned can be used simultaneously, so that you have a couple of close mics capturing the broad tone of the instrument while a third mic picks up the room sound; two spaced room mics can produce a very good stereo effect. As always when using multi-mic set-ups, check the phase relationship between microphones by inverting the polarity of one channel; if the sound becomes >

It's no good throwing up several randomly-placed mics and hoping for the best...

MULTI-MIC RECORDING

1 Listen to the sound of your main microphone. If it lacks body, try adding a mic pointing at the guitar's body just beyond the bridge. When more top-end clarity is needed, a mic positioned near the headstock, pointing at the strings will add some treble detail. When recorded onto two or more tracks, these mics can be subtly panned to create interesting stereo effects. Extreme panning will produce an unnaturally wide sound that may sound unconvincing.

2 Rather than using just one microphone in the sweet spot, try using a vertical-spaced pair. The two mics should be placed around 20cm apart on the vertical plane, with the top mic angled downwards to pick up the low-end while the bottom mic is pointed up to capture more high-frequency information. Again, judicious use of stereo panning can produce some useful spacial effects. This technique can sound good when making solo voice and guitar recordings.

3 When recording acoustic guitar and vocals simultaneously, try using two bi-directional (figure 8) mics – one each for voice and guitar – to get good separation. The mics should be positioned so that the null side of each mic is aimed at the unwanted sound source. Figure 8 mics are remarkably deaf to sounds appearing at the sides, and a surprising degree of separation can be achieved. This is useful if you need to add effects or treat one channel without affecting the other.

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MID/SIDE STEREO ACOUSTIC GUITAR

1 There are several ways of capturing acoustic guitar in stereo. A spaced pair or employing the X-Y method can give excellent results, while a mono acoustic guitar recording can be treated to a touch of stereo ambience at the mixing stage. However, the mid/side (M/S) technique is a superb method that avoids many phasing issues and is completely mono-compatible. For this, you will need to use two mics, one of which must be bi-directional, and three channels on your mixer.

2 The first (mid) microphone should be set to either cardioid or omni-directional – omni often works better with acoustic guitar. Place this mic in your chosen sweet spot. Take your bi-directional mic and place it so that it sits either beneath or above the mid mic, with the capsules as close as possible. A piece of double-sided tape to join the mics is useful here. This mic should be positioned so that the null side is pointing towards the guitar.

3 The signal from the bi-directional mic must be split and sent to another channel. Invert the polarity of this channel and pan each of the bi-directional channels left and right. Adjusting the levels between the side channels and the mid channel will determine the width of the image. If the recording is mono, the side channels will cancel each other out, leaving a mono image without any phasing issues.

fuller and more focused, use that configuration.

Recording acoustic guitar in stereo can give excellent results, particularly when it's a featured instrument in a predominantly acoustic track. There are several techniques that can be employed for this, but a detailed study of stereo recording is beyond the scope of this article. That said, the mid/side method – explained in the step by step guide – is worth trying as it can produce a very natural and convincing stereo image. Often, when musicians request 'stereo' acoustic guitar, they actually mean two separate mono guitars playing the same part, panned left and right. This double-tracking method can sound really good in many rock/pop recordings, helping to create a sense of width and space. Some engineers like to create two almost identical recordings, using the same mic in the same position on the same guitar. However, it's worth experimenting with different mics and positions – even different guitars – to determine what works best for the song.

Some acoustic guitars have pickups fitted, enabling the instrument to be DI'd or plugged into an amplifier (effectively turning it into a semi-acoustic guitar). Most engineers prefer to use microphones rather that a DI when recording acoustic instruments, but sometimes a blend of microphone and DI signals can produce good results. Just remember that the DI signal will hit your recorder slightly before the mic signal, which can cause issues with phase.

So far, we have assumed that the acoustic guitar is being recorded in isolation – it can be tricky getting a really good sound if it's being played in a small space, along with loud drums and amplified sounds. That said, many singer/songwriters like to lay down their guitar and vocal tracks simultaneously. A good trick here is to use a bi-directional (figure 8) polar pattern with both the vocal and guitar mic. Bi-directional microphones are extremely effective at rejecting sound that arrives from the sides, so if each mic is positioned so that the null side points towards the unwanted sound, good separation can be achieved.

Well-recorded acoustic guitars generally don't require too much in the way of processing, if a natural sound is desired. However, when it forms part of a busy mix, a certain amount of low-end attenuation can help the guitar sit in the track, creating space for bass instruments. At the recording stage, a high-pass-filter on either the microphone or preamp can be engaged, helping to eliminate boom; when mixing, a low-end shelving EQ is the best option. Many acoustic guitar tracks benefit from a touch of top-end boost to generate a bit of sparkle. Anything from 10kHz upwards will add some zing to the sound, but a healthy boost around 16kHz can add a lovely sense of air and space.

Another reason for using more than one mic is to capture the natural reverb...

Talking of space, a touch of reverb often sounds nice on acoustic guitars, particularly if they've been recorded with very little room ambience present; the length of the reverb will be determined by the nature and tempo of the song. A little bit of compression can help franticly-strummed rhythm guitars sit in the mix if the compressor is well set-up to respond to the tempo of the track. Excessive pick sounds can be tamed by using a very fast attack time to dull the presence of the plectrum.

Acoustic guitars feature in all sorts of recordings in any number of styles, ranging from solo singer/songwriter performances where it is the main accompaniment, to complex mixes where it provides a rhythmic bedrock. Experimenting with the techniques explained here should allow you to make professional-sounding acoustic guitar recordings with confidence.

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: readers' collections, Strat lust, guitar signal splitting and more praise for Sid...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Private collection

I have been a big fan of your magazine for years now, and every one's as good as the last. As a self-taught guitarist, I have also amassed my own private collection, that I'm sure you will appreciate, consisting of an Epiphone Les Paul Goldtop, an Epiphone Special 2, Epiphone 12-string acoustic, Epiphone Wildcat, Yamaha F310, Crafter semi-acoustic, an Ibanez GSA60, a Peavey Raptor and – last but not least – my new Gretsch Pro Jet Silver Sparkle, a 40th birthday present from my wife and daughter.

Even though this is my hobby, I would like people to know that age has no bearing on doing what you love, and I don't think that my collection will end there. Thank you for taking the time out to admire my axe collection.

Darren Haslam *Bedfordshire*

***G&B** Thanks Darren, and congratulations. As you've written the Letter Of The Month you've expanded your amp collection too!*

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

From A to Y

Firstly, congratulations on the new layout for the magazine. I find it refreshing and different, and look forward to future issues. No doubt it takes a little getting used to the new format, but change is good.

My request is for an article or Workshop item on guitar signal and splitting, etc. Also, the concept of wet and dry sounds; I believe many pro guitarists use various methods, and I am sure some are trade secrets, but it would be good to have better understanding of using various methods, ABY boxes, etc.

A while back, someone told me about the wet/dry idea that they learnt from Steve Lukather, and it allowed them to have a constant clean sound through one particular amp setup and then a dirty (effects) sound through another amp.

In particular, a distortion/overdrive sound that they could volume pedal in and out of, without foot pedal tap dancing and trying to balance the sudden peaks in volume.

Allan Meyers *via email*

***G&B** Thanks Allan, we're glad that you like the new-look mag. Signal splitting can indeed be a tricky topic but the creative potential when using two amps or running parallel wet and dry setups is enormous. Watch this space for a feature on that topic...*

Strat's entertainment

For some time, I had been wondering why you hadn't done an article on Steve Hackett. Mr Hackett is vastly underrated IMHO, and I have followed his career since I first saw Genesis in 1972.

Then, lo and behold, you do a very informative piece on him, telling me things I didn't know despite following him for more than 40 years!

It got me thinking, and I wondered how I came to have a selection of quality guitars, and yet I didn't have a genuine American Fender Strat. The next Saturday, I walked into my favourite guitar shop in Truro, where after a short chat with Andy the proprietor, my guitar quandary was solved. He had an awesome-looking American Fender Stratocaster for sale in a blond finish. I picked it up and strummed it, and after a quick play through an amp the deal was done and I took it home.

And guess what happened in the next edition of *G&B*: a Strat special!

The other things I was wondering about were Davey Johnstone, who inspired me to take up guitar in the first place; Lindsey Buckingham, who made me want to try harder and Joe Walsh, whose style I would most like to emulate... Over to you *G&B*!

Jeff Parsons *Yeovil*

G&B Thanks for your letter, Jeff. If you'd also said that you'd been wondering about Les Pauls we would have suspected that you were psychic, given the content of this issue. Keep the suggestions coming in and we'll see what we can do!

You Sid it!

Regarding Sid Bishop's article on the many ways of being a musician, I needed to read that. Last week, I spent an enjoyable afternoon playing *Sultans Of Swing* with a friend in preparation for a local jam night. I've been playing 28 years and got my backside handed to me on a plate by somebody who wasn't even born when I first picked up a guitar.

My wounded, complacent ego aside, I needed Sid's article, and I needed that Saturday afternoon experience. They've both focused my attention, and I'm taking it a sight more seriously than nine days ago. I guess my point is, each individual can call themselves a guitarist when they can do what they want to on the instrument, and other people's expectations really don't matter.

Mark Hamlett *via email*

G&B We agree, Mark. Music isn't a competition but a little motivation goes a long way!

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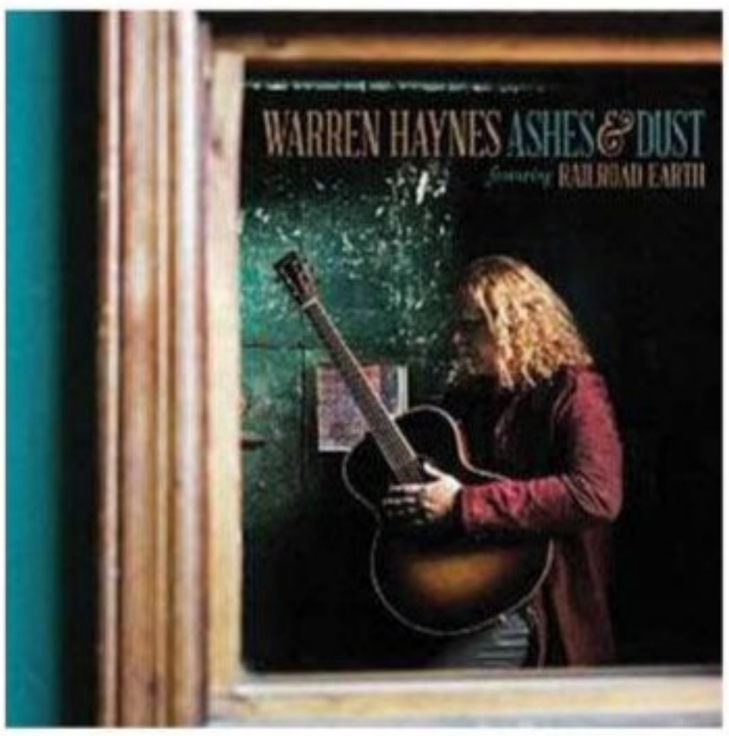
New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues



Warren Haynes

ASHES & DUST

Even with his Allman Brothers gig now defunct, Haynes may be the hardest-working guitarist in showbiz, and the silver lining could be that there's finally more time for classy, solo outings such as this. The driving blues rock of Warren's other band, Gov't Mule, is also sidelined for an earthy, soul-searching Americana that embraces bluegrass, folk and a more acoustic ethic. Backing band Railroad Earth can take some credit for encouraging Haynes down this dusty road, yet songs such as *Company Man* and *Wanderlust* still allow Warren's amped-up soloist instincts to flourish without ever breaking the wistful, nostalgic spell. Fiddles, bottleneck, banjos and mandolins all combine to create a palpable dustbowl ambience. It's new territory for Haynes, but he's ventured forth with a pioneer's spirit and made himself at home. **SB**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Steve Earle, Todd Snider*

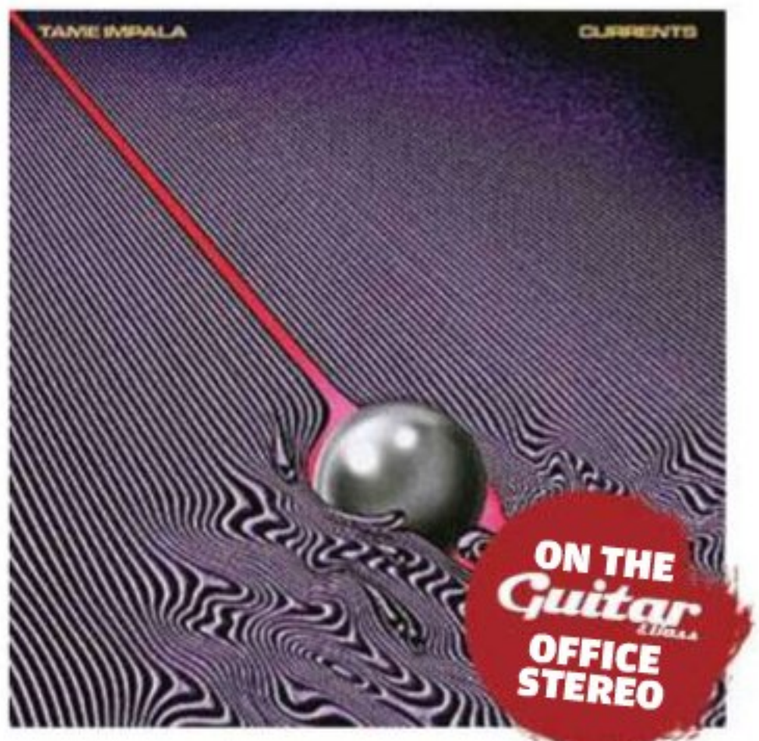
Joe Satriani

SHOCKWAVE SUPERNOVA

For his 15th studio album, Joe decided a helping hand from a Ziggy Stardust-style alter ego might be the thing to oil the wheels of creation. A fanciful concept for sure, but this device does seem to have fully uncaged Satch's affection for an irresistible hook and driven him to compose his most accessible record in years. All tracks represent moments from the life of Shockwave Supernova, a rock guitar instrumentalist – not Joe, we're assured – who is on the verge of a life-changing moment. The concept is most fully realised during *On Peregrine Wings*, which is a glorious, grandiose guitar bonanza that embraces both simple riffing and outlandish shred. More playful than overtly technical, this opus might not impress all die-hards, but it could well draw new ears to the domain of the world's favourite fretboard surfer. **SB**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jeff Beck, Oz Noy*



Tame Impala

CURRENTS

Spoiler alert for those seeking another dose of the intoxicating psychedelic rock that characterised Tame Impala's first two albums, *Innerspeaker* and *Lonerism*: you won't find it here. Inspired by Goan trance, *Currents* is a woozy synth-based record that blurs the lines between dance and 'guitar music' and flirts with the genres of disco, funk and soul. There's nothing remotely like the crushing fuzzy octaves that made *Elephant* the Australian band's signature riff, and you have to dig pretty deep to find Kevin Parker's effected guitars in the mix at all. That's no bad thing, though; this is a blissful listen that washes over you like a restorative breeze at the end of a humid summer day. When the guitar comes to the fore, it's tasteful and imaginative – the subtle riffing on *Disciples* and the lilting delayed notes at the close of *Paranoia*. Open the windows and put it on repeat. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Hot Chip, Caribou*

Wolf Alice

MY LOVE IS COOL

Heady expectation surrounded this debut, yet much of the explosive grungy shoegaze energy of the North Londoners' early EPs and live shows seems to have ebbed away during the record's lengthy gestation period. While *Bros* is a standout moment that evokes My Bloody Valentine, *My Love Is Cool* is on the whole a surprisingly restrained album, imbued with pop sensibilities, and that feels like a wrong turn. **GW**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Hole, Ride*

Godsticks

EMERGENCE

After impressing on support tours with the likes of The Aristocrats and Mike Keneally, Welsh prog trio Godsticks chose to focus on the heavier end of their sound for album number three. *Emergence* still features plenty of the cleverly-crafted ear candy and daring lead guitar work that have always been their twin calling cards, but hard riffs provide the driving force on their most cohesive collection so far. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Soundgarden, Mastodon*

Vennart

THE DEMON JOKE

By rights, former Oceansize frontman and live Biffy Clyro guitarist Mike Vennart ought to be a national treasure. His first solo effort is a work of fierce intelligence, with his wonderfully inventive vocals and guitar playing further to the fore than ever, and it's all the better for it, though there are enough twists and turns in both meter and dynamics to ensure that fans of his former band will be happy, too. **CV**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Oceansize, Biffy Clyro*

ALBUM OF THE MONTH

Muse
DRONES

The evolution of Muse from post-Britpop, Radiohead-emulating riff merchants to the ostentatious composers of *The 2nd Law* has not been to everyone's taste. Although you can't help but admire their ambition, recent records have been distant and emotionally null. It's no wonder, then, that Bellamy and co have returned to their roots with *Drones*, a concept album that addresses the military, the concept of being 'used' by a sinister Orwellian government, and breaking free of society.

It's a relief that the resulting album sounds like a Muse record, harking back to the three-piece sound they perfected circa 2003/4; but with the added confidence of their later, more outré offerings. *Psycho*'s sleazy (15-year-old) riff is perhaps the standout moment, *Reapers* resurrects the band's infatuation with RATM-style grooving and *The Defector* chugs along, punctuated by Freddie-esque histrionics. It's a return to form, with elements of the vulnerability that elevates early records *Showbiz* and *Origin Of Symmetry* above more grandiose recent offerings; although that's not to say the record lacks power – it may be their heaviest yet, with formidable but intricate guitar dominating. Welcome back boys, we've missed you. **AP**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *RATM, Radiohead*

The Aristocrats
TRES CABALLEROS

Guthrie Govan, Marco Minnemann and Bryan Beller recorded their third album over 10 days at Sunset Sound Recorders in California; and as you might expect, the level of stylistic variation and musicianship on display here is frankly bonkers. It's not all about technique; The Aristocrats sound as if they are having a great deal of fun, too, and it's comfortably the band's most accessible work to date. **CV**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Frank Zappa, Mike Keneally*

Slash
LIVE AT THE ROXY 25.9.14

Shortly after the release of *World On Fire*, Slash feat. Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators delivered a blistering set at the Roxy Theatre on Sunset Strip – where else? It's documented here in both audio and video forms. Anyone holding out for a Guns N' Roses reunion would be better off picking up a copy of this; Myles sings the GN'R hits better than Axl can these days, and Slash is as impressive as ever. **CV**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Guns N' Roses, Alter Bridge*

Reissue spotlight

60ft Dolls
THE BIG 3 (DELUXE EXPANDED EDITION)

Newport trio 60ft Dolls were one of the most exciting bands of the Britpop era, with a breakneck live show that was almost impossible to follow and killer singles that inexplicably failed to make them household names. 20 years on, their debut has aged better than the output of most of their peers, and this expanded edition is bundled with 16 bonus tracks – including a John Peel session.

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Jam, The Stooges*

***G&B* recently caught up with former Dolls frontman Richard Parfitt, now senior lecturer of popular/commercial music at the University Of South Wales. It was rumoured that Bernard Butler and Pete Townshend were on the shortlist to produce the album. We wonder what Pixies producer Al Clay brought to the sessions...**

"It's true that they were mentioned early on. Bernard is an excellent producer and a guitar hero of mine, so initially I was up for the idea. But in retrospect, Al Clay deployed a military-like regime that worked for 60ft Dolls, because, as has been documented elsewhere, we could be a difficult bunch to pin down. Al has an excellent ear for big secondary hooks, and although not a guitarist, he helped me arrange the parts in an effective manner. He also brought air rifles into Rockfield and shot at us when we were playing to keep us on our toes.

"Richard Jackson produced *Terminal Crash Fear* in a small studio in Newport, and our roadie played bass on it because Mike [Cole, bass/vocals] went missing for a while. *Pig Valentine* was produced by John Langford, and has an excellent hot and nasty sound. Langford's brilliance was in capturing the performance, rather than 'fixing it in the mix' – if you ever hear those words spoken in the studio, run a mile and sack the producer."

Your guitar playing on the album has a real abandon to it. What were your influences?

"I've been influenced as much by the people I've played with, as records I love. Townshend is the best rhythm guitar player ever. It's hard to think what guitar players might sound like if he hadn't been around. I also think Jeff Rose, from Newport's Dub War, is one of the greatest. Like Townshend, it's all in the right hand. The sloppiness of Neil Young and John Lennon's playing appeal to me. Tom Verlaine and John Lee Hooker also thrill. When I play the guitar, it's like I'm having a fight with it. Sometimes, I win, sometimes the guitar wins."

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PAUL GILBERT

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Guitar virtuoso and founding Mr. Big member Paul Gilbert stops by and lets us in on a few secrets...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"Calluses. I need them to bend the strings and get vibrato. After that, I need my Ibanez Fireman and a Marshall amp."

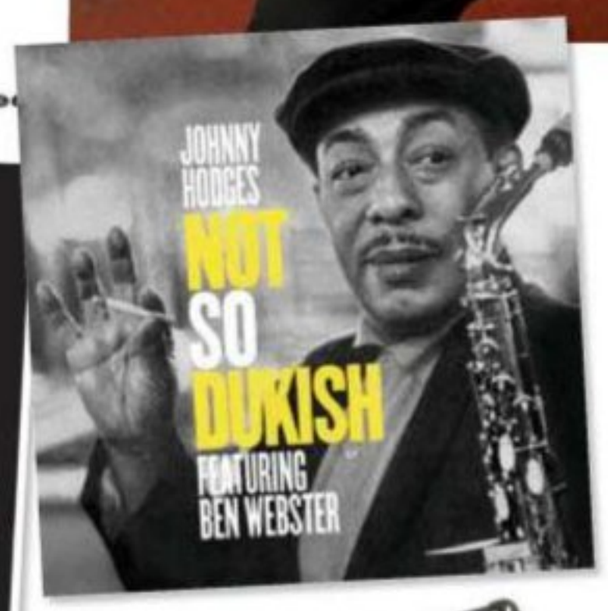
2 In another life, I would be...
"A primatologist. I've been reading a lot about baboons and bonobos lately."

3 The record that started it all...
"My parents had most of The Beatles' records. I actually wanted to be a singer like them, but my voice wasn't so good, so I put more work into playing guitar."

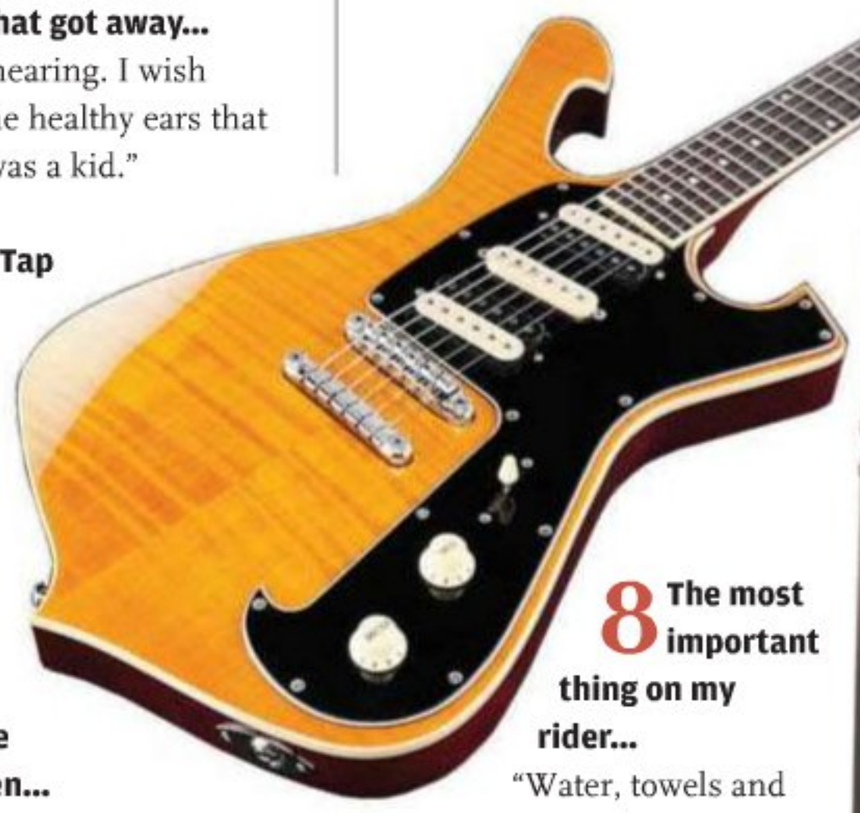
4 The one that got away...
"Just my hearing. I wish I could have the healthy ears that I had when I was a kid."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"Getting a drill caught in my hair, of course. That one is hard to top."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"My uncle taught me to put my hand on the bridge to mute the strings. That really helped me. He also told me to practise a lot."



7 The first guitar that I ever played...
"I played an acoustic guitar for two years, and then I got a used Les Paul. I didn't own a bass until I was in my 20s."



8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Water, towels and Marshall amps."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"Lately, I really love jazz clarinet and saxophone players from the 50s and 60s, when they play blues. Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton and Artie Shaw are all fantastic."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"Blues clarinet! But if it had to be guitar... I'd like to be fluent with the chords in Chaka Khan's version of *A Night In Tunisia*. I took some lessons from a jazz teacher so I could learn those chords. I've got them all written down, and practised them a few times. But I need a lot more work before I can play the song without having to read the chart. And I don't want to read the chart. I want to really know the song."

Paul Gilbert recently celebrated the three-year anniversary of Paul's Online Rock Guitar School, featuring hundreds of video lessons. Check it out at artistworks.com/paul-gilbert

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POWER TRIO

The DigiTech TRIO Band Creator pedal listens to what you play and automagically generates bass and drum parts that match your chord progressions and rhythmic feel. Simply connect your guitar to TRIO, press the footswitch to teach TRIO the chords and rhythm, then press the footswitch again to immediately begin rocking with your own Power TRIO.

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